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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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BY

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## ABSTRACT

The Labour Party suffered a gradual but apparently inexorable decline during the Fifties. Numerous explanations were offered for the Party's loss of public favour. The outcome of the 1959 General Election occasioned great consternation, and interpretations of the defeat together with suggestions for possible reforms were expressed with renewed vigour and urgency.

This study attempts to make a comparative survey of the various arguments, factors and excuses which have been submitted to account for Labour's continued electoral failures.

The theoretical framework of this survey is a so-called Pyramid of Causation which is founded upon the Theory that election results are determined by three inter-related influences: party activities, individual values, and the material and social environment.

Party activities are examined first. The effects of discord and disunity both upon the internal organisation of the Party and its public image are discussed.

Subsequently, a study is made of the changes which have taken place in individual and public values. Their consequences, regarding the association of trade unions with the Labour Party and the policy of "nationalisation" are considered.

Finally, the arguments of the "revisionists" are cited to introduce





an investigation of the social and economic changes in Britain during the Fifties. Tentative suggestions are made as to their possible political repercussions.

By way of conclusion, it is submitted that whereas the Labour Party's public image was adversely affected by some of its activities and policies, these are not in themselves sufficient explanation of Labour's decline. Rather are these factors considered to be more the symptoms of developments in the material and social environment; developments which could possibly temporarily re-establish a three party system in Britain.



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## EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

A. E. U.	Amalgamated Engineering Union.
L. R. C.	Labour Representation Committee; established in 1900 to obtain the representation of the working man in Parliament. It developed into the P. L. P.
N. E. C.	National Executive Committee of the Labour Party. Often referred to as "the Executive."
P. L. P.	Parliamentary Labour Party comprising of Labour M. P. 's and Peers.
The Labour Party	The term is properly applied only to the mass organisation of the party <u>outside</u> Parliament; it supports in Parliament a distinct and separate organisation, the P. L. P.
The Labour Movement	Inclusive of all working men's organisations, trade unions, socialist societies, etc. Frequently synonymous with the "working class" movement.
T. G. W. U.	Transport and General Workers Union : the largest union in Britain.
T. U. C.	Trades Union Congress.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Some general elections come and go like a shower of rain, freshening things up a bit, but not changing anything radically, not penetrating to the roots of our political soil. This is not likely to be said of the general election of October 1959. It will be remembered as a major upheaval, a turning point, a political watershed. Nothing in politics will ever be quite the same after as it was before, either for the three parties, for the trade unions or for any of us as individuals.

Editorial : Daily Mail

The 1959 election was significant in several respects. It created a precedent in British political history. Never before had a government increased its majority after two consecutive terms of office. Never before had a party managed to increase its parliamentary strength in four successive elections. And never before had the "mythical" swing of the pendulum been defied so decisively.

Such dramatic departures from the norm seemed indicative to many of a basic shift in values among the electorate. It was perhaps notable that the election took place at the close of a decade which had been remarkable for the rise in living standards. Between 1951 and 1959 the average consumption per head rose by 20 per cent. Consequently, it became increasingly difficult to "allocate" people to their respective classes. Wage earners were frequently better off than salary earners. A similar overlap occurred in housing as a result of new housing estates



which rendered classification almost meaningless. Culturally, the nation became more uniform in its tastes. Regional and class dialects were rapidly disappearing under the influence of education and television. Due to increased affluence and mass-production, a person's dress was similarly a less certain criterion of determining class. To many, these socio-economic changes seemed sufficient to explain both Labour's failure and the Liberal Party's revival; although Mr. MacMillan was perhaps oversimplifying matters when he declared the election had shown the class war to be obsolete.

The result sentenced the Labour Party to the ignominious fate of having lost three consecutive general elections. However, this in itself did not cause the widespread consternation in Labour ranks. More especially, it was the nature and extent of the defeat that produced almost unbelieving shock and stupefaction. On September 24th, 1959, the Gallup Poll had shown a drop in the Conservative lead. Thereafter, despite fluctuations, a marked trend developed in Labour's favour. By October 6th, the election appeared so open that Mr. Morgan Phillips, Labour's Party Secretary, predicted: "If there is no swing at all, our canvass returns show that we can not only wipe out the Tory majority but get our nose in front. . . All we want to get a working majority is a high poll." Although Mr. Phillips' statement was made for its potential electoral impact, it nevertheless would have found considerable support amongst Labour supporters. Most of these expected, at the very least, a reduced Conservative majority. Thus, the doubling of the Tory majority administered a severe "jolt" to Labour faithfuls.

An almost immediate shudder of defeat ran through the Party and expressed itself in frustrated attempts at self-appraisal and re-evaluation.





For a while, Labour, as a viable political force, seemed capable of destroying itself in vain and senseless criticism. The Party drifted, obstinately turning its back on the proposed amendment to Clause Four and indulging itself in what Bevan had described as the "emotional spasm" of unilateralism. Having attained its true objective of the Welfare State, Labour was experiencing difficulty in mapping a new course. It was generally presumed that only when its decline had been satisfactorily accounted for could Labour, with any certainty, embark upon its future political path.



## CHAPTER II

### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The problems of the Labour Party cannot be understood in isolation, for they are related to many changes in British life.

Mark Abrams, Must Labour Lose?

Elections are rarely determined by a single factor or a single group of factors. Churchill, for all his wartime prestige in 1945, could not swing the election to the advantage of the Tory Party. Nor could the Labour Party win in 1959 despite the slickness of its electioneering, the tactical advantage it gained from the innovation of a daily news conference, and the technical superiority of its political television programme. Rather, election results appear traceable to an accumulation of factors so numerous and complex that little comparative sense can be made of them unless they are, in some fashion, systematised.

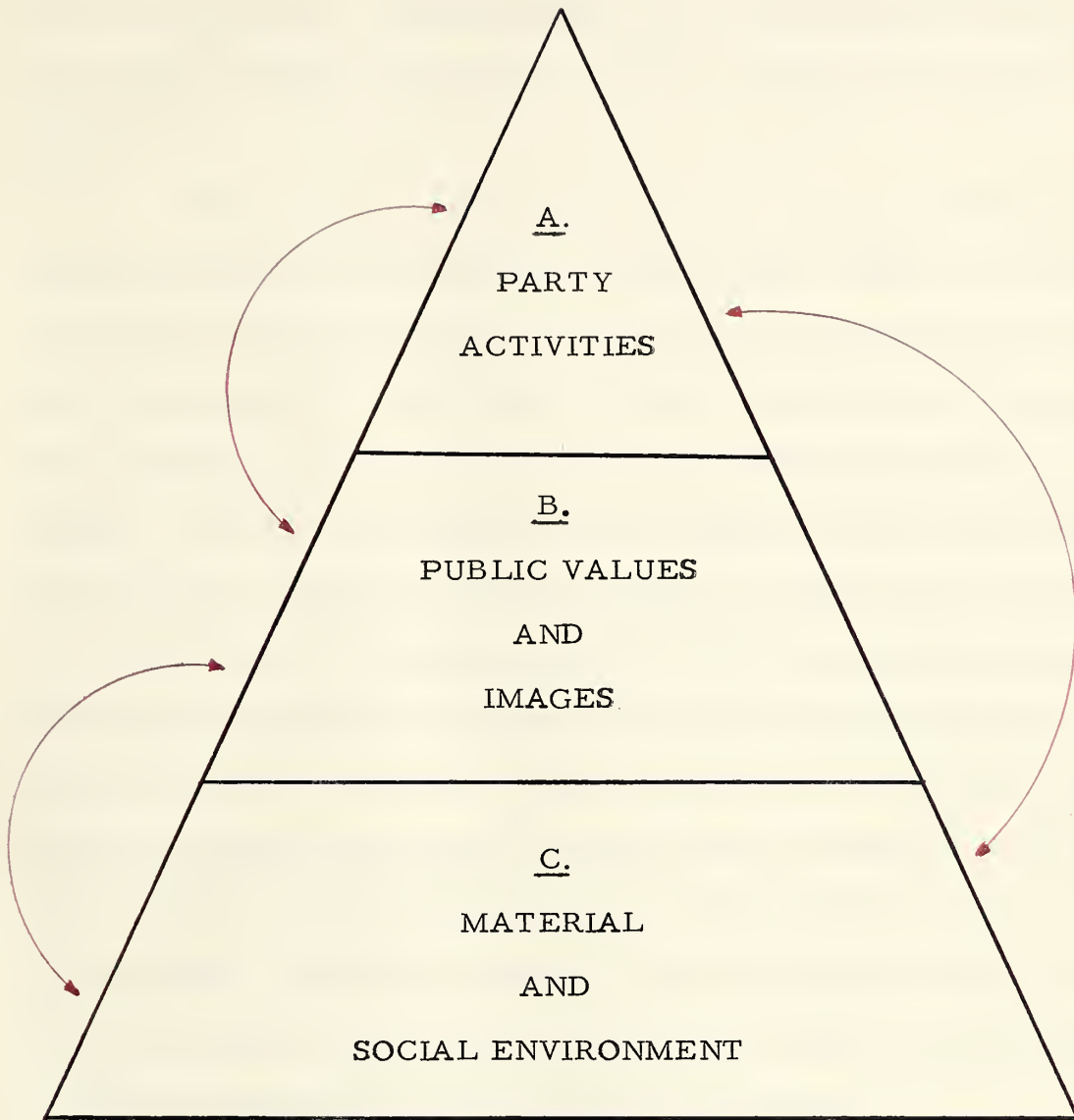
With some authenticity, the factors determining an election result can be evaluated both theoretically and graphically by means of a Pyramid of Causation<sup>1</sup>, at the base of which are the long term factors, the developments within the physical environment. These changes, though presumably basic to the political process, are not immediately

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<sup>1</sup>See diagram below, p. 5.



## PYRAMID OF CAUSATION



1. A. attempts to influence B. so as to win votes. But A. can also cause a party to lose votes.
2. B. is largely effected by C.
3. C. is generally independent of A., although it may be affected by A. via B. In exceptional circumstances A. can work directly on C.
4. Thus A. must attempt to see that it (A.) and C. are working towards the same ends in B. If the ends are contrary then the influence of C. will be the determining factor.



apparent, and recognition of their political significance is frequently retarded. However, though these environmental influences perhaps cannot be accurately gauged, their potency in the long run is undeniable.<sup>2</sup>

The most immediate effect of these changes and developments in the environment is felt in the way people think. Public values change as social relations and material objects assume new significance and novel associations. In this fashion, public viewpoints are re-oriented. Each individual arrives at a new conclusion to what seems to be an old problem, but which frequently has been adapted to the new physical environment. Nothing is therefore static. As public values change, so do the standards of society. In most western countries today, even those with strong liberal traditions, the right of personal property is no longer regarded as absolute. Public opinion in many countries has accepted nationalisation or public control of many industries, either in the name of the public good, efficiency, or the nation's welfare. Similarly, a belief in full employment, at almost any cost, despite its economic implications, has become a public tenet of paramount political importance which few parties would dare to question.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>One can take by way of example the industrialisation of Britain. It gave rise to a proletariat or working class **which** developed a Trade Union Movement. This in turn helped create the Labour Party. The decline of the Liberals, and the related rise of the Labour Party during the first half of the twentieth century, was a consequence of the effects which the material and social environment had upon the public attitudes in relation to the economic and political problems of the period.

<sup>3</sup>The sheer strength of this belief was strikingly shown in 1957 when MacMillan gave way to public pressure and removed Thorneycroft from the Treasury for the latter's insistence on a policy of economic





There is a great deal of interaction between these two lower layers of the Pyramid. Not only does the environmental base adapt physical situations to change or re-evaluate people's standards and beliefs, but also the changed public values and images themselves force social and thereby material developments on the base. Generally, the net effect is either to accelerate developments already taking place in the environmental base, or to change their direction. Rarely does it appear to reverse a development.

At the apex of the Pyramid are the party political activities. Like the environmental base, the political parties interact with the public values and images for "parties are both creatures of the electorate and formulators of public demands."<sup>4</sup> For example, the Tory Party is representative of a basic trait in human nature, that of affection for the status quo and fear of further change. Yet despite this, on detailed political questions the Tory Party must seek to have its policy accepted by the general public. This it attempts to do by interpreting its programme and policies in such a way as to utilise the public's innate conservatism, which the Party recognises to be the prime factor for its popular support.

Briefly, the manner and intention of party activities can be summarised in the following fashion. The first type of party activity

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retrenchment in an effort to halt inflation. While fiscally correct it would have had the short term effect of a temporary rise in unemployment.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Rose, Must Labour Lose? (London : Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 70-72.



is designed to effect a short term solution which is advantageous to the Party. It is concerned with the public image of the Party. In the last election, for instance, the Tory Party certainly had a more favourable public image than had the Labour Party. Utilising favourable economic circumstances to the utmost, the Tory Party during 1957-1958 and in early 1959<sup>5</sup> had become associated in the public mind with "Prosperity" and "Individual Opportunity." Furthermore, the Tories had deliberately set out to show themselves as the "Party of the Whole Country."<sup>6</sup> This establishment of a public image is not of any permanency, for such "images" can rebound on the party during an economic recession. Another form which party activities can take concerns the long term, the effects of which are more permanent. The Labour Party adopted this latter approach successfully during the years 1900-1945, when instead of creating a public image for the Party, it concentrated on changing public and social values.<sup>7</sup> Despite the defeat of the Labour Party in the last three

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<sup>5</sup>The Tory Party hit upon the idea of using newspaper advertisements in preference to the old and inefficient method of political pamphlets. Butler estimates that the Tories spent almost half a million pounds in the 27 months before the 1959 election.

1957		£'s
	Press advertising	85,000
1958	Press	130,000
	Poster - Roll Call for Victory Campaign	5,000
1959	Posters	135,000
	Press advertising	113,000
Total June 1957 to September 1959		468,000

See D. E. Butler and R. Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London : MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1960), pp. 18-25.

<sup>6</sup> Complementing this the Tories were able to represent The Labour Party as being excessively doctrinaire (nationalisation) and sectional (the "creature" of organised labour).

<sup>7</sup> There is a remark by Mr. Attlee in a letter to Harold Laski



elections, it is obvious that these social values remain unchanged, and are testimony to Labour's endeavours. But there is yet another approach that party activities can take; that aimed at converting the general public prior to an election. In this case the party attunes its programme and policies to what it recognises to be the dominant values and standards of society.

Thus the successful party must attempt to be a schizophrenic. It must both lead and mold public opinion and yet appear to follow it. Its programmes must be both firm and sure and yet appear flexible enough to be adapted to a changing physical and social environment. This the party must be - or seem to be - if it is to be successful.

While the physical and social environment never ceases to affect public values, and through them the form which party activities take, party activities can still be both restricted by and independent of the material base. Sometimes the object of a party's action and the direction in which the material environment is moving can be divergent and even at loggerheads. In this situation, the public, its values and images, will be subject to opposing forces. The result seems inevitable however. The environmental base will dominate. The party will be thwarted in its activities and will find itself out of sympathy with public opinion, to the extent

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which is very much to the point here:

"In my time I have seen a lot of useful legislation, but I count our progress much more by the extent to which what we cried in the wilderness five and thirty years ago has now become part of the assumptions of the ordinary man and woman."

quoted by G. C. Field, Political Theory (London : Methuen and Co. Ltd. , 1956),p. 137.





of losing votes and elections.<sup>8</sup>

It therefore follows that the successful Party has to attune its policies and activities to harmonise with the material and social environment. Consequently, the Party must be prepared to adapt to, and be willing to tack with the variable winds of change.<sup>9</sup> In circumstances where the influence of a traditional rigid ideology becomes a paralysing grip, the result can be disastrous to a party; but not, of course, if the ideology has relevance to the new trends of the material and social environment and is capable of continuous interpretation.

No system can claim to be one hundred percent correct, and instances may be cited to refute the relationships existing between the various strata of the Pyramid as outlined above. For example, the 1945 Labour Government, both in its election programme and subsequent actions, drastically revised the social and material environment. But the creation of the welfare state was a result of a public demand that could no longer be denied.<sup>10</sup> The point that should be considered is that the

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<sup>8</sup>For example study the decline of the Liberals in the 1920's and 1930's, together with their suicidal addition to the free trade policy.

<sup>9</sup>The Tories have long been described as the "Party of Political Expediency" since Disraeli's "volte face" in 1867. Quintin Hogg (now Lord Hailsham) provides a very good defence of the Tory Party's "adaptiveness."

"Conservatives see no inconsistency in having opposed Liberals and Whigs in the name of authority, Socialists in the name of freedom.

"The ground is the same, but it is being attacked from a different direction."

The Case for Conservatism (London : Penguin Books, 1947) p. 62.

<sup>10</sup>The unanimity of the public's demand was indicated not only by the 1945 election results but also by the fact that in 1942 both parties pledged themselves to introduce a comprehensive system of social security based on the Beveridge Report.





Labour Party had advocated this policy since 1900. It had realised then, that it could not hope to attain the millenium immediately, but that it would have to educate public opinion to the concept of social welfare. Thus, for over forty years the activities of the Labour Party were directed towards molding public values with regard to the evils of unemployment and poverty, and to the principles of social equality. The Party could never have changed the material base democratically without first changing public values. However, it is a nice question to consider to what extent public values during these 40 years were affected by party activities, and of what effect the material base was in determining a change in public attitudes. Furthermore, the economic conditions current in Britain, due in part to the advantages of social amelioration inherent in the principle of the welfare state and resulting in the affluent society, have had political repercussions disadvantageous to the Labour Party. On the evidence of three General Elections, the Labour Party is apparently unable, either to change the material environment which it helped create or, so far, to take advantage of it and use it for electoral advantage, as has the Tory Party.

Thus the problem for the Labour Party seems to be that it not only is losing contact with the base of the Pyramid, that is to say, the material and social environment, but also, that through its actions and slavish devotion to outmoded policies, the Party is actually destroying its public image as a radical and forward looking political movement, and is in danger of running contrary to the developing physical environment.



## CHAPTER III

### PARTY STRIFE AND ELECTORAL DEFEAT

It would have been easy to despair of the Labour Party, so incoherent, so lacking in all shrewdness, so undermined by egoism and disloyalty to the elected leadership.

Hugh Dalton, Memoirs 1945-1960 : High Tide and After.

One can safely assume that party activities are designed to effect, to the advantage of the party, the public's values and images. Party activities are most blatant in this respect during an election campaign. From the lowest level where the local prospective candidates kiss their constituents' babies to the highest level where the party programme seeks to convince the electorate that "It's time for a change!" or "You've got it good - have it better," the activities of the party are specifically designed to win votes. Even the most mundane electioneering activities such as organising a car fleet for election day, or canvassing a district effectively can be a deciding factor in the party's quest for votes. Sometimes, however, party activities can prove distinctly harmful to the election chances of a party. Certainly, the return of only 46 Labour M. P. 's in 1931 was attributable to a considerable degree to Macdonald's defection, together with those of his lieutenants Snowden and Thomas. Similarly, the acrimonious disputes between the Asquithian and Lloyd George Liberals, if they did not in fact cause the decline of British Liberalism, did nothing



to arrest that decline. Thus it is worth noting that the 1950's have been described as the Decade of Dissention and Decline for the Labour Party.<sup>1</sup>

None could deny that the predominant feature of the Labour Party during the last decade was the bitter disputes and the intense factionalism within the Party. If the Labour Party had one coherent and consistent policy throughout this period, it was that epitomised by the term "divide and rule;" only it was the Labour Party that was divided and the Tories that ruled. Some Labour parliamentarians would have us subscribe to the view that Labour's decline in the 1950's was proportionately related to the disputes and divisions in the Party; but this is presuming rather too much at the expense of several other factors.

Political historians have now come to regard it as almost inevitable for a left wing party to be periodically rent by internal strife.<sup>2</sup> Like the Liberal Party in the nineteenth century, the Labour Party in ours is considered to be the forward reforming party, and befitting this role, it has from time to time exhibited a conflict of ideas within its ranks as to what constitutes progress, and at what speed the necessary action should be taken. The 1930's was a period remarkable for the proliferation of doctrinal disputes and intense factionalism within the Labour Party.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Pelling, A Short History of the Labour Party (London : MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), Ch. VII.

<sup>2</sup>Herman Finer, Governments of Greater European Powers, (New York : Henry Holt & Company, 1956), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>In 1932 the I. L. P. was disaffiliated for its extreme left wing activities. The same year saw the New Fabian Research Bureau come into being and also the Socialist League comprising of I. L. P. personnel. The Socialist League under the leadership of first Wise and then Cripps became increasingly left wing and took an active part in the Popular Front





Yet it was also the time when the Party consolidated itself after the débacle of Macdonald's defection; it was the time which saw the Party resume its steady growth in the country leading to the trebling of its parliamentary strength in the 1935 election, and which also enabled it to continue winning by-elections right up to the declaration of war.

Despite this qualification, however, it is undeniably the case that the open disputes in the 1950's did considerable harm to Labour's public image insofar as it blurred the public's idea of what the Party stood for,<sup>4</sup> and also by laying the Party open to Tory attacks.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, during the periods which immediately preceded the General Elections in 1951, 1955, and 1959 the Labour Party, and indeed the Labour Movement generally, were in turmoil.

Soon after the 1950 election, it became apparent that the Party and Government were experiencing increasing difficulties. The foundations of the welfare state had been clearly established; the utilities and basic industries were already under public ownership. Yet it was obvious there existed a conflict of opinion within the Party as to the policy a Labour

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Movement as late as 1939. For a full resume of this period see Pelling, Ch. V., and G.D.H. Cole, History of the Labour Party from 1914 (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1948), Ch. VII and VIII.

<sup>4</sup>Ralph Miliband considered that "by 1959, Labour's image was much too blurred to give either the defeat or victory so precise a political or ideological meaning." Parliamentary Socialism (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 344.

<sup>5</sup>Attlee certainly considered this to be the case. Commenting on the Bevanites he said: "Of course these splits didn't help us when we came to the Election." Francis Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers, (London : William Heinemann Ltd., 1961), p. 249.





Government should adopt to attain its socialist objectives. No doubt part of the increased tension ensued from the knowledge that the overall majority of six, so different from the majority Labour members had been used to, would incur a greater strain upon ministers and private members alike to preserve the government from premature defeat. Attlee's ministerial team was also weakened. Cripps and Bevin were obliged to resign due to ill health, and both shortly afterwards died. Attlee himself was plagued by illness and was unable to exercise effective leadership at a most critical time. The Abadan oil crisis revealed the deficiencies of Morrison as a Foreign Secretary and the Korean War proceeded to impose a continually greater inflationary strain upon the country's economy.<sup>6</sup>

The resignations of Bevan, Wilson, and Freeman close on the heels of Gaitskell's remedial Budget were a "natural" corollary to the Party's internal strains and publicised what had previously been a hidden and sometimes dormant ideological division within the Party.<sup>7</sup>

Defeat in the 1951 General Election served only to further widen the gulf between the Party leadership and the Bevanite Group. These Bevanites had been vigorously campaigning and gaining support amongst the militant left wing activists of the local constituency parties and, using these as a base, were making their play for power at the Annual Conference. However, the first real split came in 1952 during the rearmament

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<sup>6</sup>c.f., Index of Prices: February 1950 - 113; October 1951 - 129.

<sup>7</sup>There exists a difference of opinion as to whether this could be considered an ideological dispute. Attlee suspected "personal differences" were involved and stated: "I didn't believe there was any real clash of principles involved." Bevan's letter of resignation did not, however, subscribe to this view: "I am sure you will agree that it is always better that policies should be carried out by those who believe in them. It would



debate when 57 Bevanites and "friends" disobeyed the Party Whip and voted against the government motion.<sup>8</sup> Later at the Party Conference, the assault on the leadership was intensified to such good effect that six of the seven constituency seats on the National Executive were won by Bevanites. Thereafter the National Executive, so important as the administrative arm of the Party became a "cockpit of conflict." Small wonder that the Wilson Committee could discover such glaring deficiencies in the party's electoral machinery.<sup>9</sup>

Just before the election in 1955 a fresh issue arose to further divide the Party. This was German Rearmament. After much discussion the Parliamentary Labour Party agreed to accept it in principle - but only by 113 votes to 104. Bevan himself resigned in an attempt to reverse the decision at the impending Conference, but failed due to the Trade Union bloc vote directed by Arthur Deakin. Bevan's insubordination did not end here however. In early 1955, with the election obviously imminent, Bevan together with 61 others abstained from supporting the official Labour Party amendment with regard to the manufacture and use of the Hydrogen Bomb. For these and other sins the shadow cabinet decided to withdraw the whip from Bevan. It was not the happiest of preludes to an election campaign

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be dishonest of me to allow my name to be associated in the carrying out of policies which are repugnant to my conscience and contrary to my expressed opinion." Williams, pp. 247-8.

<sup>8</sup>This parliamentary insurrection on the part of the Bevanites was only possible because the Standing Orders of the Labour Party had been suspended in 1946. Needless to say the privilege was speedily withdrawn.

<sup>9</sup>It was a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Harold Wilson to enquire into the state of party organisation. Its report was submitted to the Party Conference in October 1955.



and some were not slow to point the finger when the results of the election became known. Woodrow Wyatt apparently had little doubt as to the cause of Labour's defeat when he declared:

Despite the defects of our electioneering we still could have won if we had not carried the weight of Bevanism.<sup>10</sup>

The Labour movement was again in turmoil before the 1959 General Election. While Labour's leaders were still re-approving the Party's defense policy the situation began to run out of control. Frank Cousins joined with Robert Willis, the chairman of the T. U. C. as platform speaker at a nuclear disarmament rally at Trafalgar Square. At the same time, Anthony Greenwood, a member of the National Executive, called upon the Party to adopt as its policy the unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons. The ultimate shock came when the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, which under Sir Tom Wilkinson had been the sheet anchor of the Party's right wing, voted for a unilateralist motion at their Union Conference. Subsequent events were bathetic and of academic interest only; and the decision of the Transport and General Workers Union at their conference at the Isle of Man in favour of Unilateralism was significant only for the fact that the Union controlled one-sixth of the voting rights in the Labour Conference. The summation of these actions and decisions served to prove that the Labour Party could once more enter a General Election with its image blurred on the important questions of foreign policy and defense.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Woodrow Wyatt, "I Accuse Bevan!", Sunday Express (London) May 29, 1955.

<sup>11</sup>"Towards the Polls," The Round Table, Vol. XLIX, (London: The Round Table Ltd., 1959), pp. 378-380.





Though the effect of these splits upon public opinion was unfortunate, the Labour Party could be thankful that the situation was not even worse. For long the full extent of the split within the Party was masked from public view. During the early days in opposition, this was due to Attlee's prestige as a past and possible future Prime Minister, but more especially was the facade of unity maintained by the support which the parliamentary leadership received at the Annual Conference from the strong Trade Union right wing bloc headed and organised by Arthur Deakin, Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. The resignation of Attlee and the death of Deakin did tremendous harm to the parliamentary right wing of the Party especially as Deakin's successor was Frank Cousins, a militant left winger. But once again the Labour Party was saved from impending disaster by the Suez Crisis. Both wings of the Party were united in opposition to the "Intervention." Furthermore, the prospects of an early return to power, which this issue presented, momentarily united the Party behind the parliamentary leadership. When the storm had passed the important and permanent effect was Bevan's rapprochement with Gaitskell which deprived the militant left wing of the Party of its greatest asset and the official leadership of its heaviest cross.

Yet despite the way in which the Party decisions were restricted and sometimes "papered over" they were ruthlessly illuminated by both the Tory press and Party, and apparently had considerable impact upon the public.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>According to the Socialist Commentary Survey only 18% of Labour voters in 1959 believed the Labour Party had a united team of top leaders. Yet 20% of the same sample voted this quality as the most important in a political party.





The second characteristic of the fifties was the decline of the Labour Party. In the four General Elections of this period, the parliamentary representation of the Party progressively decreased. With most parties, defeat at a General Election occasions critical self-appraisal to discover how such an unpardonable situation could have come to pass. Following the nadir of the Tory Party's electoral fortunes in 1945, the reaction was both swift and decisive. The Maxwell Fyfe Committee was set up with wide terms of reference and its report was the basis of the revitalising of the Tory Party; a process which saw Lord Woolton in charge of a remodelled Party organisation, which saw the improvement of Tory candidatures through a diminution of the influence of wealth on local constituency parties and which also saw the Party's intentions analysed into "Principles, Policy and Programme" so as to allow the Tory Party both consistency and adaptability.<sup>13</sup>

The Conservatives reacted vigorously to defeat because they still tend to feel that they are in some special sense-"called to rule." Rejection at the hands of the electorate is not regarded therefore simply as a slight on the Party but as a self inflicted wound on the country, even an interference with destiny. But the Labour Party, faced with successive electoral defeats, reacted differently. First, reaction of any kind was retarded because many Labour M. P. 's are happier when in opposition. Furthermore, extreme socialists tend to feel that it is the electorate and not the Party which has been found wanting, and, as always, the non-

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<sup>13</sup>For a more complete summary see R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London : William Heinemann Ltd., 1955) pp. 63-4; 272-3; 594-6.



conformist element in the Party rears its head and consoles itself with the belief that principles are more important than the pursuit of power. From these and allied attitudes have sprung many of the Party's present problems.

The 1951 Election defeat occasioned little recrimination within Labour ranks. Attlee admitted that Bevan's resignation had not helped the Party's chances,<sup>14</sup> but despite this Labour's vote had increased to almost 13,950,000, the largest received by any political party in British history, and a quarter of a million more than that of the Tories and their allies combined. Labour supporters could console themselves with the knowledge that it had not been so much the Tories, as the electoral system which had defeated the Party.<sup>15</sup> The Daily Herald considered that the Labour Party had no reason to feel downhearted and added:

There has been no landslide, only a gentle swing which has left the Tories with a meagre majority.

Attlee was similarly undismayed being more impressed with the increase in the Labour vote than the Tory victory which, he explained, merely indicated that "when it came to the point, more Liberals were Conservative than Labour."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Williams, p. 249.

<sup>15</sup>The accidental bias of the system discovered by H. G. Nichols after the 1950 Election was estimated to be worth about 500,000 voters for the Tories. See D. E. Butler, The British General Election of 1951, (London : MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1952) Ch. X.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 244. See also Miliband's reasons for Labour's complacency: (i) Belief that the party needed a breathing space to restore energies. (ii) Assumption that Tory rule would be disastrous. Miliband, p. 318.



However, the results of the 1955 election could not be shrugged off so lightly. It was the third consecutive election in which the number of Labour seats had declined. Compared with 1951, the Labour poll had fallen by over 1-1/2 million. Few could now deny that something was amiss. Accordingly, the Wilson Committee was set up to enquire into the state of party organisation. In the interim report, presented to the Annual Conference in October 1955, the Committee admitted itself shocked at the state of party organisation in many parts of the country and described the electoral machine as "rusting and deteriorating with age." To this alone it specifically ascribed the loss of 47 seats.<sup>17</sup> Yet despite the obvious attempt at a critical self-examination, the inference of the Committee's findings, perhaps due to the confined terms of reference,<sup>18</sup> was that there was still nothing fundamentally wrong with the Party.

This opinion was echoed by most of the nation's newspapers. Two reasons were most frequently cited to explain Labour's defeat. The Daily Mirror assured the world:

LABOUR LOST---because its organisation is RUSTY, INEFFICIENT, pathetically INFERIOR to the slick Tory machine.

Whereas, the News Chronicle considered it had been the Bevanite split

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<sup>17</sup>Finer, p. 79.

<sup>18</sup>The immediate assumption of the National Executive seems to have been that the defeat was due to the abstention of Labour voters rather than the fact that the Tories had won over new converts. Butler, however, finds little to support this theory of the results. See The British General Election of 1955 (London : MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1955) p. 160. Despite this, the abstentions were considered the prime cause of defeat and these were blamed upon the party's organisation. Thus the Committee's field of investigation was severely restricted.





which had been the deciding factor. It reasoned:

A party which offers itself as the Nation's only alternative government cannot afford the confusion of civil warfare.

But here again, most were prepared to look no further than party divisions and antiquated organisation to explain Labour's poor showing.

Defeat in 1959 was of such dimensions, however, that it at last became clearly apparent that a reason of deeper significance had to be found. The Labour Party had been out of office for eight years during which its vote had fallen from 13,948,605 or 48.8% of the vote to 12,215,538 or 43.8% of the vote.<sup>19</sup> Not only was the 1959 Election unique in British political history with the Tories winning three consecutive elections with increasing majorities but the result was significant also, because it appeared to question the doctrine of the inevitability of socialism.

Cautious questionings on this subject had already been voiced by a few, following the 1951 defeat which had banished many socialist hopes that the 1945 election had seen the eclipse of the Tory Party as a powerful political force. In the early and middle fifties several commentators of the British political scene observed that practical success in the form of Attlee's two post-war administrations seemed to have raised the threat of ideological bankruptcy in Labour ranks.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>20</sup>The Sunday Times (London) May 29, 1955. Its editorial recognised this and at the same time made some prophetic comments on the direction the Labour Party was moving: "The Labour Party has reaped the fruits of its divisions: but more than that it has patently failed to inspire even its own supporters with faith in a dynamic programme. Its old policies have been exhausted or discredited and there is nothing to take their place except the snares of neutralism and the exercises of the Left intellectuals;" see also Lane Davies, "British Socialism and the Perils of





The impasse in which so many socialist theoreticians found themselves was a dominant theme in the New Fabian Essays.<sup>21</sup> The variety of views expressed therein was paralleled by the situation within the Labour Party itself, which was variously described as a healthy rethinking of basic postulates and the hapless confusion of intellectual bankruptcy, depending upon a person's political sympathies. The attitude of the socialist theorists to the welfare state changed. Instead of the first step towards a Socialist Commonwealth, it was now regarded as a road-block or a socialist-made life-preserver that threatened to keep the modified but nevertheless still capitalist society afloat for an indefinite period by relieving some of the worst social and economic stresses inherent in the capitalist system.

The 1959 Election intensified these doubts and together with such books as Crosland's The Future of Socialism and Galbraith's The Affluent Society, caused many a sincere socialist to question the validity of his philosophy in a developing and in many respects a unique economic environment. Reflecting this attitude was the reaction of Labour leaders to the election results. Mr. Gaitskell, no doubt in an attempt to look on the bright side of the picture, pointed that on balance fewer than three electors in every two hundred had switched sides. But the moral which Dick Crossman drew was the more general interpretation of the results.

In this era of Tory prosperity a Labour opposition has had to run very fast in order to stay where it is. Each year which takes us further not only from the hungry Thirties but from the austere Forties,

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Success, "Political Science Quarterly" (December 1954), pp. 502-16.

<sup>21</sup>R. H. S. Crossman (ed.) New Fabian Essays, (London : The Fabian Society, 1952).



weakens class consciousness. And if nothing is done to stop this national tendency, more and more Socialist voters turn first into don't knows and then into active Tories.<sup>22</sup>

But there was an added difficulty of depressing proportions that now faced the Labour Party. After ten years out of office all its leaders had assumed a shadowy quality. The Labour front bench no longer looked like an alternative government : rather, it looked like a collection of men who thought that politics was fun, and for whom the excitement of the game was its own reward. Many appeared willing to accept the position and even to enjoy the role.<sup>23</sup> The net result was the consolidation of the Tory Party's image as that of the normal governing party. Obviously such a development could augur only ill for the future of the Labour Party.

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<sup>22</sup>R.H.S. Crossman, quoted by D.E. Butler and R. Rose, The British General Election of 1959 (London : MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1960) p. 197.

<sup>23</sup>A typical exponent of this position is Mr. James Griffiths. He appeared to accept the situation rather too philosophically for the health of the party when he declared: "We are the party of change...And this time the majority of the electorate had no passionate desire for change." Ibid., p. 199.



## CHAPTER IV

### GROUP ACTIVITY WITHIN THE PARTY STRUCTURE

The alliance of the trade unions (paying the bill), the constituency parties (doing the work), the Parliamentary Labour Party (the professionals), the National Executive (not independent of the bodies it represents, and anyway meeting only once a month), the Cooperative Party (roaring in the sidelines), and the leader himself (the man who collects the brickbats but seldom the credit) - this heterogenous hodge-podge of pressures and counter-pressures, emotions, jealousies and ambitions, is totally incapable of coming to the sort of decisions a modern political party needs to take.

#### Editorial : The Political Quarterly

The previous chapter dealt with the adverse effect party activities could have upon the Labour Party's electoral fortunes. It became apparent that the most unfavourable aspect of the Labour Party's activities was the continued dissention within its ranks. In consequence all its electioneering and propaganda was conducted in an atmosphere of mutual acrimony. But freedom of thought and discussion, the right to disagree with the official leadership, and the opportunity for the rank and file of the party to present alternative constructive policies, are perfectly legitimate in a party, and in many cases essential to the constant reinvigoration of that party's policies and tactics. Belief in these principles of "inner party democracy"<sup>1</sup> has characterised the Labour Party

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<sup>1</sup>R. T. McKenzie, "Labour's Need for Surgery," The Observer (London), October 25, 1959.





through all periods of its growth. Nonetheless, one is bound to question how these internal disputes were permitted to develop to the point of doing actual harm to the Party and its image in the country.<sup>2</sup>

In seeking for a more basic reason to explain these divisions, a study of the organisation of the Labour Party leads the writer to assume that the constitution and structure of the Party are such that they can equally incite and widen Party divisions. But it also becomes apparent that distinct social groupings exist which, to a large extent, follow the constitutional and organisational lines of division within the Party. The coalescence of the two factors magnified and intensified the differences in the Labour Party to such a degree they created an unfavourable electoral image in the country.

Many have declared the resultant image to be that of a ramshackle, hidebound organisation and that this in turn has given the impression of a party impervious to social change, or if aware of it, unable to shake itself loose from the moribund institutional chains hampering it.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup>Butler believed "its (the Labour Party) internal squabbling... greatly reduced its vote getting ability." The British General Election of 1955, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup>For instance, a Times editorial considered: "The vaunted democracy of the Labour Party is in many respects a farce. So long as it was operated in such a way as to prevent a collision between the Conference and the responsible Parliamentary leadership--the leadership, that is, that emerges from the verdict of the electorate and is answerable to the electorate--so long could the farce be tolerated. It is imperative now for the Party to reform its constitution." The Times (London), October 6, 1961. "Let Us Face the Future!" Political Quarterly, Vol. 31 No. 3 1960, pp. 229-40.

See also Wedgewood Benn's comments: "The Party Constitution is far too cumbersome in operation and requires careful re-examination (and) we have allowed ourselves to deteriorate into rather a ramshackle outfit..." See "Modernising the Party," Where?; Fabian Tract 320 (London: The Fabian Society 1959), pp. 11-14.





chapter will attempt to show to what extent this is true and to what extent this image of the Labour Party might have been the cause of the Party's inability to win general elections in the 1950's.

It is very easy to lay the blame fairly and squarely upon the constitution and structure of the Party. The most important exponent of this "institutional" argument is R. T. McKenzie.<sup>4</sup> Writing in the immediate aftermath of the 1959 General Election, with the white heat of the electoral battle scarcely cooled, McKenzie posed the question:

After losing parliamentary strength in four successive elections, will Labour's parliamentary leaders now summon the courage to decapitate, in one drastic operation, this hydra-headed monster, the party constitution?<sup>5</sup>

Although McKenzie here presents a general condemnation of the Labour Party constitution, the main focus of his attack concentrated on the Annual Party Conference, which he regards as an irritant embedded deep in the constitution. From this results a practice of "inner party democracy" that McKenzie holds to be:

grossly inappropriate to a system of Cabinet and parliamentary government (in which) effective power must be focused, and be seen to be focused [*my italics*], in the team of parliamentary leaders, who emerge from the only popularly elected section of the Party, its representatives in the Commons.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See his most comprehensive work, British Political Parties, also "Power in British Political Parties," British Journal of Sociology, Vol. VI (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1955) pp. 123-32. Also several newspaper articles following the 1959 General Election.

<sup>5</sup>McKenzie, The Observer, October 25, 1959.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



The intent of McKenzie's argument and proposals is clear. He believes that the parliamentary system of government must function on the basis of caucus control of the national parties. Apparently, McKenzie would have the lines of responsibility extend upwards from the individual M.P. to the parliamentary party and thence to the national electorate. None could deny that the connection between the party in the House of Commons and the constituency members is very real. It is a complementary relationship of responsibility and discipline. The relationship, however, between the parliamentary party and the country, is perhaps not so distinct but it is, nonetheless, definite. Assuming the *raison d'etre* of a political party is to win elections, then it must be aware of and amenable to the shifting desires of the electorate.

So far, McKenzie's argument is valid, but in its development he seems to tread less safe ground. He does not continue to prove, as one might expect, that the Labour Party's public image has been damaged because its policy is determined by woolly headed idealists from the constituency parties, or that its democratic decisions can be vetoed by one or two of the trade union leaders. Instead, he seeks to show that the appearance of these practices spoils Labour's chances. McKenzie's real contention is that the democratic constitution of the Labour Party is just a facade, which has been perpetuated throughout the years as a very useful stick with which to beat the Tories.<sup>7</sup> Now, however, this successful

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<sup>7</sup>Referring to the Labour Party "Handbook" used in the 1951 General Election, McKenzie quotes: "Only the Tories prefer the personal infallibility of a Leader to the collected wisdom of their members... The Leader of the Conservatives is all-powerful. He is beyond the control of the party conference and of the National Union." From this and other quotations, McKenzie concludes: that Labour writers are in effect taunting



ruse has backfired, according to McKenzie, because it is flagrantly apparent that the Parliamentary Labour Party has control of the Conference. He says, for example, "one knew that Mr. Gaitskell would 'win' at the party conference (1959), even though it was thought necessary to build up his strength by staging the unedifying spectacle at which the G and M (General and Municipal Workers Union) reversed itself."<sup>8</sup> Following through McKenzie's argument this was not only an "unedifying spectacle" but also an unnecessary one because

the Labour Party almost without realising it has come to accept a principle of party leadership not different in its essentials from that which operates in the Conservative Party.<sup>9</sup>

If the Labour Party has indeed come to accept a form of party leadership commensurate with the Tories, there still remain considerable differences in substantial detail between the two parties. The fulcrum of Labour's Constitution, the Annual Conference, is regarded in quite a different light by Labour supporters, from that in which Conservatives view their Party Conference. Despite McKenzie's arguments, the "democratic facade" of the Labour Party Constitution has persistently

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the leaders of the Conservative Party for their success in escaping the dangers... of the mass Party," and that such efforts as these "are inspired mainly by a desire to incite their own followers and the uncommitted electors to rally to the task of keeping their wicked and 'undemocratic' opponents out of office." McKenzie, British Political Parties, pp. 10-17.

<sup>8</sup>McKenzie, The Observer, October 25, 1959.

<sup>9</sup>McKenzie, British Political Parties, p. 334. Quite obviously the process must have been very gradual and imperceptible; so much so that the Annual Conference in 1960 was completely unaware of it. Gaitskell, despite all his "wily" machinations was unable to reverse the trade union vote and was forced to admit his impotence to control the Conference. For a period his position as leader appeared in jeopardy.





indicated that in particular areas and under special circumstances, it is very tangible. The dispersal of power in the Labour Party, although not as wide as the Constitution infers, is still sufficiently real for Labour's leaders to tread warily.

Throughout its history, the Labour Party has tended to regard the Annual Conference as almost the "supreme arbiter" of "The Movement." In part, this attitude is explicable by the manner in which the Labour Party came into being.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the Tory Party, Labour was not initially a parliamentary group of like minded individuals, who gradually institutionalised an intra-parliamentary system of organisation and control, and which then, and only then, extended its activities into the country by means of local constituency associations. In other words, whereas the Tory Party created a national constituency organisation to supplement its parliamentary activities, the Labour Party was itself the creation, and in the early stages even a creature of a miscellany of extra-parliamentary groups.<sup>11</sup> Mindful of such origins, Emmanuel Shinwell's declaration at the 1920 Party Conference that "the P.L.P. is the property

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<sup>10</sup>For detailed accounts of the origin of the Labour Party: Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party (London: McMillan & Co. Ltd., 1954). G.D.H. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1941). Frances Williams, Fifty Years March: The Rise of the Labour Party (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1948).

<sup>11</sup>The predominant group and moving spirit was the Trades Union Congress comprising of a few hundred thousand trade unionists who banded together with several socialist societies of various hues (from the revolutionary S.D.F. to the evolutionary Fabians) in order to effect "the representation of Labour in the Commons." The Taff Vale Judgement had effectively shown that the T. U. 's had "no refuge except the Ballot Box and Labour Representation." 1902 L. R. C. Annual Conference Report, p. 12.





of the Labour Movement"<sup>12</sup> becomes comprehensible, if not entirely laudatory.

But as the P. L. P. holds a subordinate position in "The Movement" in terms of its origins, the Annual Party Conference is, by the same yardstick, of great importance. It is the instrument by which each year the constituent elements of the British Labour Movement, the Trade Unions; the Socialist Societies; the Fabians; the Co-operative Movement; the Constituency Labour Parties and the Parliamentary Labour Party are all brought together. It is the "forum" of "The Movement."

The considerable prestige of the Conference derives from historical and sentimental associations, but its authority was never intended to be commensurable.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the 1918 Constitution gave the Party Conference substantial policy making functions.<sup>14</sup> But there is nothing in the Constitution giving the Conference or the Executive Committee power to instruct a Labour Government while it is in office or the P. L. P. when in opposition. "However," as Morrison admits, "considerable attention and respect is given to the views of the Conference and the Executive."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ivan Yates, "Power in the Labour Party," Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, pp. 300-11.

<sup>13</sup>Some indication of the real value placed upon the Conference can be gained from Sidney Webb, one of the framers of the 1918 Constitution. He described the constituency delegates to the Conference as "frequently unrepresentative groups of nonentities, dominated by fanatics, cranks and extremists" and added "...if the bloc vote of the trade unions were eliminated, it would be impracticable to continue to vest the control of policy in Labour Party conferences." See The Observer, October 25, 1959.

<sup>14</sup>See Appendix A, for relevant sections of the Labour Party Constitution.

<sup>15</sup>Herbert Morrison, Government and Parliament (London : Oxford University Press, 1954) p. 140.



Despite Morrison's admission, various actions by the Parliamentary leadership have done much to substantiate the potential power of the Conference.<sup>16</sup> Attlee, when asked in 1940 whether Labour would take part in a coalition with someone other than Chamberlain as Prime Minister, was unable to give a definite commitment:

I said I thought they [the Labour Party] would but that as the Party was holding its Annual Conference at Bournemouth I would go down and ask the delegates:-

1) Would they enter a Government under the present Prime Minister?

2) Would they come in under someone else?<sup>17</sup>

At this crucial juncture, Attlee obviously felt constrained to approach the Conference. Again in 1945 the decision to leave the wartime coalition was determined partly, at least, by the N.E.C.'s belief that "it would be quite impossible to persuade the delegates to the Annual Conference to support the continuance of the Coalition for an unspecified period."<sup>18</sup>

McKenzie's contention, that 20 years of Attlee's leadership had virtually transformed the power relationship within the Labour Party to that prevailing in the Tory Party, appears doubtful when one considers the

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<sup>16</sup>Attlee seems most to blame in this respect. The Party after MacDonald's defection presumably decided... "better a self-effacing modesty, than a self-destroying vanity." Undoubtedly the Party was suspicious of parliamentary leadership, and this hampered Attlee. Yet some of his statements do seem to carry his compliance too far and to boost the Annual Conference to the detriment of the parliamentary leadership. E.g., "The Labour Party Conference is in fact the Parliament of the Movement." C.R. Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective (London: Victor Gollanz, 1937), p. 93.

<sup>17</sup>C.R. Attlee, As it Happened (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1954), pp. 112-3.

<sup>18</sup>Francis Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers, p. 64.



German Rearmament Question. Attlee, even in 1954, still clearly recognised the role played by the Annual Party Conference as that of "ultimate arbiter of The Movement."<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, through the years, power in the Labour Party instead of being focused in the parliamentary leadership, has been diffused through the two most important organs of the Party. Labour's leader, in addition to considering the opinions and attitudes of the caucus, has also been forced to take note of Party Conference resolutions and decisions. Effective leadership has thus been jeopardised. Gaitskell, especially, has so been forced to concentrate on keeping divergent groups together that he could attempt little positive leadership. The result has been indecision and procrastination. All too often, the Annual Conference has been the occasion for papering over the party splits with the result that resolutions have frequently been framed in the most ambiguous and controversial terms. The prestige of the Conference in the Labour Movement was such that everything possible was done to maintain the facade of perfect partnership between it and the Parliamentary Party.<sup>20</sup>

Had the National Executive Committee fulfilled the role expected of it, that of co-ordinating the two branches of "The Movement," much of the dissention which has harmed Labour's image, might have been

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<sup>19</sup>An inner-party vote had indicated to Attlee the seriousness of the split in the P. L. P. on the question of rearming Germany. He ordered the P. L. P. to abstain in the Commons decision and await directions from the Labour Movement at the impending Party Conference.

<sup>20</sup>See Yates, Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, p. 306.





avoided. Unfortunately, due to the manner in which the N. E. C. membership is constituted, it served only to aggravate party conflict and to publicise party disputes and divisions.

During the mid-fifties, the National Executive became a "cockpit of conflict." The Bevanites, denied positions of authority in the Parliamentary Party,<sup>21</sup> turned their attention to the next best alternative, the N. E. C. Events proved that they were right to do so. Although the majority of seats on the N. E. C. are controlled by the Trade Union vote (18 out of 28) there are seven seats specifically set aside for the local constituency parties. It was at this "grass-roots" area of the movement that the Bevanites were strongest<sup>22</sup> and in the 1954 elections to the Executive their strength was strikingly illustrated, with 6 of the 7 constituency seats being won by recognised Bevanites. This development had several unfortunate repercussions. Almost inevitably, it meant that the left-wing parliamentary rebels, having gained positions of authority in the Party, were more in the public eye, whence they could far more effectively publicise their arguments and re-emphasise their differences

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<sup>21</sup>It seems doubtful that the Bevanite group in the Parliamentary Party ever numbered more than 40, even at their strongest. This was out of the total complement of approximately 290 M. P. 's. Thus while they could be vocal, they were an ineffectual minority and had little success in electing representatives to the Parliamentary Committee of the Labour Party.

<sup>22</sup>T. E. M. McKitterick, "The Membership of the Labour Party," Political Quarterly, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 312-23) shows the strength of the left-wing activists at the constituency levels of the party, indicating they were natural allies of the Bevanites. Dalton expressed his views of them somewhat more forcefully. He considered them "freaks and neurotics." Memoirs 1945-1960 : High Tide and After (London : Frederick Mueller Ltd. , 1962) p. 445.





with the parliamentary leadership. Another consequence was the ushering into the N. E. C. of a vocal and virulent group, more concerned with expounding and expostulating its socialist doctrines than dealing with the more mundane problems of internal administration of the Party. Thus the whole tone of the N. E. C. was changed. Not only did it develop into a rival policy making body to the Labour Parliamentary Committee,<sup>23</sup> but its control of the organisation of the party correspondingly lapsed. Whatever worth the Executive Committee had previously had, was nullified by the presence of a well organised opposition group quite capable of holding up major decisions and of paralysing the Committee.<sup>24</sup>

In support of his thesis, that the Labour Party Constitution is a "facade," McKenzie submitted proof showing how the Parliamentary Party controlled the Conference. The keystone of this proof depended upon the fact that the National Executive Committee, which determines the agenda of the Conference, always contained a majority of M. P. 's.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>This problem was recognised by Dr. Saul Rose. Although he admitted it was not a bad thing for the membership of the Parliamentary Committee of the Labour Party and the N. E. C. to be different, he concluded: "The real trouble is that they are both trying to do the same job - giving political leadership to the Party." Saul Rose, "Back to Clause 8," Socialist Commentary (May 1960).

<sup>24</sup>Three years' experience of such a minority group led the N. E. C. to institute in 1954 the principle of cabinet solidarity on all its members - in an effort to keep internal disputes private. The resolution read as follows: "Decisions arrived at by a majority vote are binding on the Executive Committee itself. Any infringement of this rule shall be dealt with at the next subsequent meeting." Quoted by McKenzie in British Political Parties, p. 524.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, pp. 600-1.



But this in itself is not sufficient. Since the "Bevanite" intervention in 1951 there had always been a small group of M. P. 's hostile to the official party policy and parliamentary leadership. One can certainly argue that during the Thirties and Forties, the parliamentary party was able to control the composition of the N. E. C. and through it, make the Conference pliable to the policies of the parliamentary leadership. No doubt the present parliamentary leadership would wish to do the same if it were possible. But since 1955, this has not been the case. The powerful Trade Union voting bloc in the Conference, which under the leadership of Bevin and later Deakin, had been solid in its support of the parliamentary leadership, showed signs of cracking with the emergence of Frank Cousins as General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. This development considerably weakened the hand of the Parliamentary Party. Whereas previously the 18 Trade Union dominated seats had been solid for the Parliamentary Labour Party, they became in the late Fifties less dependable and "solid" for the parliamentary leadership. Simultaneously, Attlee's resignation gave the Party a new leader who was less capable of enlisting sympathy and support for the parliamentary leadership from the rank and file Conference delegates. Meanwhile the Bevanites had been actively wooing these same constituency delegates to a line of policy in opposition to the Parliamentary Party; and to such good effect that from 1952-54, six of the seven constituency seats on the N. E. C. were won by Bevanites. The net result was a weakening of the Parliamentary Labour Party's control of the N. E. C. and, at the same time, a change in the character of the National Executive from a largely administrative organ of the Party to a policy deciding body: so that by



the 1959 Election there were two parallel but differing sources of policy - the Parliamentary Party and the National Executive Committee.<sup>26</sup>

The changes, however, did not pass unnoticed, and those who criticised these developments most were those who realised that the power, prestige and position of the parliamentary group was being threatened. Many cited the constitutional argument that the governing power in Britain was Parliament and not the Party Conference.<sup>27</sup> This, of course, was no new argument. Much had been made of it by Churchill in his correspondence with Attlee concerning the "Laski Affair."<sup>28</sup> What was new, however, was that the critics offered constructive suggestions. Both Crosland and Wedgewood Benn deplored the decline of the Parliamentary Party's authority and to rectify this, proposed that a specific number of seats be set aside on the National Executive for representatives of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The intention behind this proposal presumably, was to remove the need for M.P.'s to seek election to the N.E.C. as constituency representatives, which generally ruled out the possibility of moderate right-wingers being elected. In 1958, Alfred Robens suggested that constituency delegates only should

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<sup>26</sup>Rose, Socialist Commentary (May, 1960).

<sup>27</sup>Yates, Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, p. 311.

<sup>28</sup>The affair originally concerned Attlee's status at the Potsdam Conference. Laski, then Chairman of the N.E.C. declared that if Attlee went it could be as an observer only, as matters would be discussed "which have not yet been debated either in the Party Executive or at meetings of the P.L.P." Churchill seized on this as proof of Executive control of the parliamentary party. Attlee conceded in reply that the N.E.C. had "a right to be consulted" but vigorously denied that it had the "power to challenge actions and conduct of a Labour Prime Minister." For full text of correspondence, see Morrison, Government and Parliament, pp. 139-144.





sit on the National Executive. This, though quite different from Crossland's and Benn's proposal, would have had the same result. By confining membership of the N. E. C. to local party workers, the "verbo-crats" or publicised left-wingers, would be excluded; and in consequence the prestige of the N. E. C. might be expected to fall. Eventually, Robens wished to see the National Executive acting in a purely administrative capacity, thus removing the opportunity for policy disputes between it and the Parliamentary Party.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, according to the Constitution, this division of functions already exists. The N. E. C. is specifically assigned the task of jointly drawing up an election manifesto with the Parliamentary Labour Party. But there is no doubt that the prime function of the National Executive is as the "administrative authority of the Party." Not only is the N. E. C. constitutionally relegated to second place as regards policy making,<sup>30</sup> but by its very nature it is a poor policy making body, meeting as it does, but once a month. Thus, to quote Dr. Saul Rose, there is no need for revision of the Constitution but merely a return "Back to Clause Eight."<sup>31</sup>

Disturbing though the divisions embodied in the Constitution are, they do not of themselves completely explain the disruptive disputes in the Labour Party. Earlier in the chapter it was pointed out that social divisions exist within the party which tend to run along the same lines

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<sup>29</sup>Yates, Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, pp. 301-4.

<sup>30</sup>Appendix A.

<sup>31</sup>Socialist Commentary, May 1960.





as the institutional separation of powers. It was further shown that these two factors, the one emphasising the other, contributed towards creating the image of a disunited party, perpetually plagued by fractious individuals and garrulous groups.

Probably the group that did greatest disservice to Labour during the 1950's was that consisting of constituency party delegates to the Annual Conference. Naturally, the Conferences of the two great parties in the country receive a blaze of publicity. Thus, it is the lot of the dedicated Labour Party workers to find themselves each year thrust into the political limelight. Recognising the frailties of human nature, it is by no means easy to persuade these dedicated souls that they are, in reality, no more than trustees for the 12 million Labour voters in the country. Yet they tend to consider the Labour Party and themselves as synonymous. The trouble is that party workers are no longer representative of the Party as a whole. Nevertheless, it is these local party workers who comprise the majority of delegates at the Annual Conference. As a result, they tend to dominate the debates in Conference and to set its political tone, so that outside observers gain an impression of the Labour Party far more left-wing and doctrinaire than it really is. For the most part, the local constituency workers consist of earnest young men and dedicated socialists.<sup>32</sup> Very frequently they are extremely left-wing in their political attitudes and probably extremely moralistic on such questions as unilateral disarmament and co-existence. The one common

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<sup>32</sup>For a detailed description of the "typical" local Labour Party worker, see the article by T.E.M. McKitterick, Political Quarterly, Vol. 31.



philosophy they share is basically "anti-authority." Frequently they border on anarchism and most of them have a contempt for the solidly respectable "bureaucrats" or "planners" who form the official leadership of the Party. All too often, these local party workers "join the Labour Party full of enthusiasm, less for what it is than for what they think it ought to be."<sup>33</sup> The practicalities of power, administration and sober government bore these anarchists. Political dialectics, socialist doctrines and dogmas are far more appealing. Small wonder that each year, when these constituency delegates are brought together, the disputes at the Conference resemble "the quarrels of a latter-day saint society more concerned with historical orthodoxy than with practical measures."<sup>34</sup>

It is Labour's misfortune that its public image is created largely by the Annual Conference, by delegates who are quite atypical and unrepresentative of The Movement and who almost certainly are out of sympathy with the 12 million electors who supported the Labour Party in the 1959 General Election. The Conference provides a "field day" for left-wingers and pacifists alike. But as Denis Healey pointed out to a Conference which had enthusiastically received Michael Foot's garbled and vitriolic comments: "What earns cheers in this Conference does not necessarily win votes in the country."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>"Labour in the Wilderness, " The Round Table, Vol. I, 1959.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



The Parliamentary Labour Party is quite different in personnel from the constituency party delegates to the Conference. The P. L. P. is the only popularly elected group in the Labour Party and as such is more concerned with and amenable to the public's likes and dislikes. In addition, the parliamentarians are very conscious of the image which the public might form of the Labour Party. Moreover, success in elections is a prime concern of the P. L. P. which produces an attitude amongst Labour M. P. 's of respectful interest for the "floating vote." Electoral studies have shown that the "floating vote" oscillates between the two parties and that this has often decided elections.<sup>36</sup> It therefore seems likely that extreme socialism will only repel this section of the electorate. Thus the P. L. P. has been more moderate than the constituency parties, on whom the realities of the political situation seem to have been lost in recent years.

Not only is the Parliamentary Party different in its political outlook but it is also distinctive in its social composition. As regards occupations the middle class element is strong.<sup>37</sup> There were 30 Labour M. P. 's in the 1959 House of Commons who were either barristers and/or solicitors before the election. Twenty-five Labour M. P. 's were from the very middle class profession of teaching, while another

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<sup>36</sup>See for example, Benny, Gray and Pear, How People Vote (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), pp. 216-22; John Bonham, The Middle Class Vote (London : Faber & Faber, 1954), pp. 174-7; Milne and McKenzie, Marginal Seat 1955 (London : The Hansard Society, 1958), pp. 36-51.

<sup>37</sup>See Appendix C for a classification of Members of Parliament in both the 1955 and 1959 House of Commons. There is also an article which is quite useful, by Adele Bagnell, "The Shape of the New House," The Observer (London) October 25, 1959.





22 were actively engaged in journalism. In education a similar pattern was apparent. Although the Conservative connection with Oxbridge is stronger, there were nonetheless 33 Labour M.P.'s from Oxford and 13 from Cambridge. In addition the provincial universities provided the Labour Party with 61 M.P.'s compared with only 33 M.P.'s for the Conservatives. It appears the Parliamentary Labour Party has strong middle class characteristics as regards both occupation and education. When one considers that the last two leaders of the Labour Party, Attlee and Gaitskell, were both of upper class public school and Oxford backgrounds,<sup>38</sup> the picture is completed and the dissention between the P.L.P. and the Annual Conference becomes comprehensible.

One element remains, however, which can further illuminate Labour's problem. The Parliamentary Party is not a single cohesive group. Although it has a middle class, professional air about it, there has always existed a small dissatisfied segment. In the 1950's this group was designated the "Bevanites," later the "Victory for Socialism" group. Regardless of its name, the group has looked to the Annual Conference to promote its aims where it has consistently found like-minded leftists. These idealists and political non-conformists in the P.L.P. have been suspicious, like the local constituency workers, of the parliamentary leadership. Thus Gaitskell, Brown, Healey, Jenkins, and even Wilson are classified as the "planners" and dismissed as "political bureaucrats"

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<sup>38</sup> Chapters 1 and 11 of Attlee's book, As It Happened, give a good resume of his social background. There is no comparable work on Gaitskell's early days but there is an article in the Sunday Express (London) November 2, 1959, which provides useful information on early biographical details.



for whom political power is all important. To the socialist "purist" such sentiments are almost treasonable, threatening to dilute the socialist faith with bourgeois materialistic ambitions.

Since its very inception, however, these opposing groups have co-existed in the Labour Party. Birch, writing in the Manchester Guardian Weekly argues that co-existence is no longer possible:

The truth is, surely, that the Labour Party consists of incongruous social groups, divided by wide groups of mutual incomprehension, who have been united in the past only by their common belief in a myth... (of Social Democracy)... that there is a third way of organising society, which is neither capitalist nor Communist but something in between, combining the virtues of political freedom and a socialised economy... which is now exploded, and who have little in common save their memories of past bickerings.<sup>39</sup>

While there is no need to exaggerate and belabour the point as does Birch, one must certainly accept the fact that the appearance of "Butskellism" and "welfare-state capitalism" called for a rethinking of socialist theories by the Labour Party. Despite this, Birch's "incongruous social groups" still have enough in common to work together. What has tended to widen the gulf between the social groups is the lengthening period in the political wilderness. As the Labour Party lost elections the "dogmatists" of the left became convinced of the need for real socialist policies to woo the voters and contended that the Labour Party programmes have been virtually indistinguishable from the Tory's. The P. L. P., from its more national and moderate standpoint, has withstood these demands, recognising in them atavistic and even cannibalistic tendencies.

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<sup>39</sup>A. H. Birch, "The Labour Party's Real Split," Manchester Guardian Weekly, November 24, 1960. See also an article in similar vein by Alastair Buchan, "The Odds Against Gaitskell," The Reporter, December 22, 1960.



The manner in which group inter-relations operate in the Labour Party, and the way in which groups utilise the Party's various constitutions can best be observed by a case study of one particular Conference. Of recent times, the most notorious is the recent 1960 Annual Conference when the official defence policy drawn up by the P. L. P. was rejected. At the same time, contrary to the advice of the official leadership, two "unilateralist motions" proposed by the T. G. W. U. and the A. E. W. were approved.<sup>40</sup> It was a damaging reversal for the Parliamentary Party and a personal "slap in the face" for Gaitskell.

Before the unilateralist motions came down to the floor of the Conference, an indication of the real problem was given in the form of a resolution which sought to have the Annual Conference accepted as the "final authority." The resolution ran as follows:

While acknowledging that the day to day tactics in Parliament must be the job of the Parliamentary Party, this Conference declares that the Labour Policy is decided by the party conference, which is the final authority.

In all modesty, the Conference passed the resolution by 3, 586, 000 votes to 1, 874, 000 votes. Quite obviously there was no doubt in the minds of the Conference delegates as to their position and importance in the Labour Party. Furthermore, the resolution had the blessing of the National Executive Committee. It agreed, in the words of its Acting Secretary Mr. Williams, to support the resolution: "as long as it is clearly

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Resolutions to the floor	For	Against	Majority
Official Defense Policy	3, 042, 000	3, 339, 000	297, 000 (A)
T. G. W. U. Motion (unilateralist)	3, 282, 000	3, 239, 000	43, 000 (F)
A. E. U. Motion (unilateralist)	3, 303, 000	2, 896, 000	407, 000 (F)

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understood that nobody at all has the power to instruct, control or dictate to the P. L. P. on the way it carries out its responsibilities." As the Times' Labour Correspondent dryly remarked, the conference delegates could thus have the satisfaction of running hard on the spot without moving an inch from where they started.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the important thing was that the Conference had gone through the motions of reaffirming its supreme authority by consciously reducing the P. L. P. to a subordinate position. At this stage, both sides could claim ascendancy. The angry young men of the constituencies were able to point to the majority of almost 2 million, by which the resolution had been passed, as proof of their strength; whereas the P. L. P. could show that the resolution merely reiterated what the Constitution stated and emphasised the fact that the N. E. C. had only bestowed its blessing on condition that the resolution meant no real change, which in itself seemed to remove all point in the resolution.

Most delegates pondered what effect this would have upon the parliamentary leadership if a unilateralist policy was adopted, as seemed probable, by the Conference. Many of Attlee's precedents seemed to indicate that the P. L. P. would accept the decision of the Conference as binding. Some Conference delegates of venerable years no doubt could remember Macdonald's unequivocal declaration of the independence of the Parliamentary Party in 1928:

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<sup>41</sup>"Labour Conference has 'final authority'--but no control," The Times (London), October 5, 1960.





As long as I hold any position in the Parliamentary Party--and I know I speak for my colleagues also--we are not going to take our instructions from any outside body unless we agree with them. <sup>42</sup>

Few had since dared to beard the Conference so openly. Generally the leadership had been maintained by stealth, by the unholy alliance of the Parliamentary Party and the Trade Unions. Now, however, that alliance was split. The leftists of the P. L. P. together with the dedicated dogmatist delegates of the local constituency parties had, for the moment, won over the majority of the T. U. votes. The question was, could the Parliamentary Party, having lost its traditional command of a solid T. U. vote, disregard the decision of the Conference.

Gaitskell's speech of October 5th left the Conference in no doubt as to the attitude of the Parliamentary Party. In categorical terms, Gaitskell denied that the decision of the Annual Conference on policy matters was binding upon the P. L. P.:

We may lose the vote today and the results may deal this party a grave blow. It may not be possible to prevent, but there are some of us who will not accept that this blow need be mortal, who will not believe that such an end is inevitable. There are some of us who will fight and fight and fight again to save the party we love, who will fight and fight and fight again to bring back sanity and honesty and dignity so that our movement with its great past may retain its glory and its greatness. <sup>43</sup>

In support of his case, Gaitskell reverted to the Burkeian theory. He denied that Labour M. P. 's were in any way the delegates or rubber stamps

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<sup>42</sup>Quoted by Yates, Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, p. 308.

<sup>43</sup>See Report on the Labour Party Annual Conference, The Times (London), October 6, 1960.



of the Conference, and also drew its attention to the fact that, as M.P.'s, they had responsibilities to their constituents.

It is not in dispute that the vast majority of Labour M.P.'s are utterly opposed to unilateralism and neutralism. What did you expect them to do?... To change their minds overnight, to go back on the pledges they gave to the people who elected them in their constituencies?... I do not believe the Labour M.P.'s are prepared to act as time servers... because they are men of conscience and honour.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, recognising that, to a large extent, the attack on the P.L.P. was one mounted personally against him, Gaitskell re-emphasised, for the benefit of the Conference, the basis of the Leader's position. "I have heard," he stated, "that the issue is not really defence at all but the leadership of this party. The place to decide the leadership of this party is not here but in the P.L.P."<sup>45</sup>

But the very success of the alliance of dissident left-wing M.P.'s, unilateralist trade unionists and "angry young men" from the constituency parties, brought about the very thing it had fought to prevent. Gaitskell's speech in defeat revealed a sterling character. He suddenly emerged as a leader of consequence. Despite the misgivings of some M.P.'s over Gaitskell's stand,<sup>46</sup> the vast majority were for him and his policy. In

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>For example, one parliamentary veteran, Ness Edwards, in a speech made on September 15 following Gaitskell's action, voiced his disapproval: "It will be political suicide for the Parliamentary Party to refuse to take into account the decision of the Conference. While Labour M.P.'s are not the delegates of the party in Westminster, neither, while they are members of the Party, are they entitled to disregard and in some cases to openly defy the party decisions." He concluded with an implied reference to Gaitskell: "None of us is big enough to set ourselves above The Movement." Reported in the Sunday Express (London), October 16, 1960.



the following 12 months, the traditional alliance between the P. L. P. and the Trade Unions (with the exception of Frank Cousins' T. G. W. U. ) was restored to such good effect that the 1961 Conference overwhelmingly reversed the 1960 Unilateralist decision<sup>47</sup> and completely vindicated both the position of Gaitskell as leader, and, indirectly, the authority of the P. L. P. McKenzie's statement that "as long as they retain the confidence of a small group of leading figures in the trade union world, the Labour Leaders can be reasonably confident that no hostile majority will form against them within the mass organisation,"<sup>48</sup> was completely vindicated by the turn of events in 1960-61.

Despite Gaitskell's ultimate victory in 1961, the fact that for 12 months he had been required to set about putting his party in order meant that little time or energy had been left to deal with the Tories. In addition, the public had been presented with a picture of a leader who could control his party only with difficulty. The public naturally questioned his ability to control the country should he become Prime Minister.<sup>49</sup> Although political common sense finally filtered through to it, the Party's Annual Conference also lost prestige. As Pendennis pointed out:

People are...beginning to wonder whether, if one set of people one year nuff and the Party goes unilateralist, and the next year another set of people puff and the Party goes multilateralist, it

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<sup>47</sup>See John Cole, "Mr. Gaitskell's Triumph, " Manchester Guardian Weekly, October 12, 1961.

<sup>48</sup>McKenzie, British Political Parties, p. 456.

<sup>49</sup>The Labour Party image did not suffer only in the eyes of the general public. Membership of the party fell off 108,000 between the 1960 and 1961 Conferences, due, no doubt, to the enthusiasm of local Labour supporters being sorely tried by the frequent internal crises. See "The Labour Party Machine, " Manchester Guardian Weekly, October 12, 1961.







really matters quite so much what Conference decides.<sup>50</sup>

Regardless however, of the underlying consequences to the internal balance of power in the Labour Party, the events of the first two Conferences of the 1960's completed a process that had been continuing through the 1950's; a process which was discrediting the Party's organisation in the eyes of the public and which had damaged Labour's political image in the country.

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<sup>50</sup>See Pendennis, "Table Talk : Eight Just Men for Labour," The Observer (London), June 25, 1961.



## CHAPTER V

### THE TRADE UNIONS AND LABOUR'S IMAGE

The links between The Labour Party and the Trade Union movement are ancient and strong. Without them, the Party would be a sort of wishy-washy Lib-Lab Coalition or else a futile socialist splinter group. It is for exactly this reason that the Party must take note of the fall in popularity of the Trade Union Movement. This is causing anxiety to the Trade Union leaders and has political repercussions that effect us.

Anthony Wedgwood - Benn, Where?

Even a brief study of the Labour Party's Annual Conference exposes the strength of the Trade Unions in the British Labour Movement. Significantly, the decision of the 1960 Conference to accept a policy of unilateral disarmament for the Labour Party was precipitated by a similar decision of the A.E.U. at its conference. Again, in 1961, the determining factor in reversing the 1960 decision was the swing in the union vote. It appears the parliamentary leadership had no doubts as to where the real power of the Conference lay. In the intervening 12 months, most of Gaitskell's efforts concentrated on regaining the renegade trade union vote and to such good effect that he won a most impressive victory in the 1961 Conference.<sup>1</sup>

As one might suspect, the trade unions' influence in the Labour

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<sup>1</sup>See Pendennis, The Observer (London) June 25, 1961; also Dalton, Memoirs 1945-1960 : High Tide and After, p. 445.



Party has been a considerable factor in the development of Labour's electoral image. Since the turn of the century the two bodies have been held together in an apparently indissoluble union,<sup>2</sup> from which definite benefits have flowed. The Unions received from the Labour Party (a socialist party after the 1918 Constitution) a broad social purpose in society, while the Labour Party gained an intimate knowledge of the industrial life of the nation. In the early days the association was undoubtedly a source of strength to the Labour Party, and was a considerable factor in depriving liberalism of the working class vote. Recently, and especially in the '50's, the alliance has come to be regarded as a doubtful asset to the Party, and some have even gone so far as to describe the trade unions as an electoral liability.<sup>3</sup>

The problem, briefly stated, is that in an association of so close and intimate a nature both get tarred with the same brush. As a result the trade unions' loss of public sympathy (almost inversely proportional to the increase of wildcat strikes and demarcation disputes) has been

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<sup>2</sup>Harrison concludes after exhaustive interviewing of trade union officials and members that despite the present problems "the link with the Labour Party has become so embedded in tradition that today in most of the large unions it is an unspoken assumption." Martin Harrison, Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960) p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>C.A.R. Crosland, Can Labour Win? Fabian Tract 324, (London: The Fabian Society, 1960) pp. 9 and 17. Alan Birch, "More than a protest, "Where? Fabian Tract 320, (London: The Fabian Society, 1959) p. 18. Criticism had become so widespread that at the 1959 Labour Conference, Gaitskell saw fit to vigorously reject the motion that the Labour Party should break with the trade unions: "I have always looked upon the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party," he said "as part of the same great Labour Movement and our close integration as one of our great strengths." Quoted by Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p. 347.



shared by the Labour Party. Moreover, the general public, mindful of the changed attitudes towards trade unions, have been less willing to accept the alliance of the trade unions with one of the nation's major parties. Prompted by a predominantly Tory Press, the public have come to view the association as one of subservience by the Labour Party to the narrow interests of organised labour.

The reaction against the trade unions is one of comparatively recent origin. One of the issues taken up by Labour in the 1951 Election was that arising from a party political speech given by Sir David Maxwell Fyfe which seemed especially addressed to trade unionists. He urged the trade unions to free themselves from their 50 year old tie with socialist theories and- almost by way of inducement- assured his listeners that the Tory Party recognised the importance of trade unions and promised that a Conservative Government would take no legislative action against them without first holding a round table conference. Considering the 1950 Conservative Campaign Guide<sup>4</sup> the implications of Maxwell Fyfe's remarks seemed clear. The Labour Party and the Trade Union Movement had no doubts. Their common reaction was the fear that the Tories intended to reintroduce the 1927 Trade Disputes Act, and they hounded the Tories bitterly on this issue. The Tory Party, obviously feeling the temper of the country was against them, made an important withdrawal at Labour's first challenge, a conciliatory abandonment of contracting-out and the closed shop.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Campaign Guide promised that after consultation with the unions the Tories would re-establish contracting-in "on which" it pointed out "we (the Conservatives) have strong convictions of principle." Harrison, pp. 25-31.

<sup>5</sup>Churchill himself sprang to Maxwell Fyfe's defense denying





Although the Tories were fairly safely established after 4 years in power, during the 1955 election campaign they made little or no mention of trade unions; presumably heeding the dictum "let sleeping dogs lie." Instead, it was left to the Liberals to champion the cause of union reform as part of their crusade against restrictive practices.<sup>6</sup> But this, together with the rest of the Liberal programme, made little impact upon the course of the election campaign.

By 1959 the situation had changed. The Tories had discontinued the frontal attacks on the Trade Union Movement, which had been their practice while in opposition, and (urged on by younger M.P.'s such as Ted Leather) were encouraging Conservatives to be good trade unionists. In this way, it was hoped to wean the unions away from the Labour Party and towards political neutrality.<sup>7</sup> The trade unions had also changed. They were less the political "sacred cow" they had been in 1951 and consequently the Tories were tempted to criticise them more overtly than had been their practice. However, they did not overplay their hand

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that the Conservatives had any ulterior motives regarding the trade unions. When the 1951 Guide was published the "political levy" was not mentioned once (c.f. 1950 Guide). Furthermore it is suggested that because of this controversy, Maxwell Fyfe, hotly tipped as the future Minister of Labour was in fact given the Home Office when Churchill formed his government. See Butler, The British General Election of 1951, p. 108.

<sup>6</sup>Milne and MacKenzie, Marginal Seat 1955, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>Churchill was apparently convinced of this as early as 1951 when he declared "...the Conservative and Liberal membership of the trade unions is growing so steadily that a wider spirit of tolerance has grown up, and the question (of the political levy) may well be left to common sense and the British way of settling things." Daily Notes, Conservative Central Office, October 12, 1951, quoted by Harrison, p. 30.



and press for legislation to reform the trade unions. Such action could well have caused the working classes and the "Left" to close their ranks to meet the challenge. Instead, the Tories merely reiterated the popular complaints and shared the public's righteous indignation against such practices as "sending men to Coventry." The Tories were quite prepared to allow the unions to continue to damn themselves in the eyes of the public.

In the election campaign itself, the trade unions were left severely alone because, as Butler points out, "they presented delicate problems to both major parties."<sup>8</sup> But the harm had already been done. Mr. George Woodcock, then Assistant General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress admitted, in a broadcast made several months before the General Election, that the public were becoming increasingly resentful of "wildcat strikes," demarcation disputes and other union practices.<sup>9</sup> Apparently at the time of the election the trade unions were in such bad odour that further Tory criticism would have been superfluous.

That the trade unions lost public sympathy in the 1950's is not altogether so puzzling a conundrum. Britain's position in the post-war world had been one of economic insecurity. The need to compete with the revived economies of the continental countries, Germany in particular, revealed the basic weakness of Britain's economy together with the archaic nature, not only of management and production techniques, but also of union organisation. Any stoppage of production

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<sup>8</sup>Butler and Rose, The British General Election of 1959, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 28.



came to be regarded almost as a national calamity. In this respect, demarcation disputes and strikes have made the headlines to the outrage of the general public.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, as a result of the Labour Party programme in 1945-51, the public section of industry had been expanded considerably with the effect of almost nullifying the strike weapon. Now, more often than not, it is not the "factory boss" who suffers from strike action but the general public who, as an interested party, are less able to appreciate the virtues of the union case. But there also existed a more human reason. The trade unions were no longer the downtrodden, exploited organisation they were in the 1930's. The Repeal of the Trade Disputes Act in 1946 considerably strengthened their financial position<sup>11</sup> and the post-war boom, with its consequent labour shortage, consolidated their bargaining position. Churchill's conclusion that the trade unions had become the Third Estate of the realm was increasingly valid in the '50's, and this development could well have led to the unions forfeiting the traditional British sympathy for the underdog.

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<sup>10</sup>One such dispute held up production in the shipyards on Merseyside for 6 months. It concerned the Woodworkers Amalgamated Society and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions in a dispute over the drilling of holes from steel plates into wooden frames.

<sup>11</sup>The Trade Disputes Act of 1927 had been passed in the aftermath of a General Strike by a revengeful Conservative Party. It sought to outlaw political and sympathetic strikes, to prohibit the enforcement of closed shop by public authorities, and to tighten the laws on intimidation. The Civil Service Unions, the P.O. Workers, the Tax Officers, and the Civil Service Clerical Association were forced to abandon their affiliation to the Labour Party, cease political action and wind up their political funds. All Civil Service Unions were forced to withdraw from the T.U.C. and finally, contracting-in replaced contracting-out. The Repeal of the Act in 1946 obviously strengthened the hand of the trade unions.







There can be no doubt that the trade unions did lose considerable public sympathy in the 1950's. Surveys taken during and after the 1959 election campaign give some indication of the extent of their fall from public favour.

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS LINKS BETWEEN TRADE UNIONS AND LABOUR PARTY

	Cons. supporters %	Labour supporters %	Others %
Approve	9	56	22
Disapprove	57	18	40
No feelings one way or other	8	8	12
Don't know	26	18	26
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	100	100	100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

# REASONS FOR DISAPPROVING LINK BETWEEN TRADE UNIONS AND LABOUR PARTY

	%
Unions should be non-political	41
Restricts workers' freedom	25
Gives unions too much political power	8
General anti-trade-union comments	7
Other answers	15
Don't know	4
	<hr/>
Total	100
	<hr/>

Significantly, disapproval of trade union activities was not confined solely to the Tory electorate. Only 56% of admitted Labour supporters conceded that the trade unions were doing a good job. Those



who thought the trade unions were definitely doing a bad job, and this group included 37% of the Tory supporters, cited 2 reasons most frequently in support of their attitude:

- a) the frequency and nature of strikes;
- b) the trade unions were too rich and powerful.<sup>12</sup>

#### WHY UNIONS ARE DOING A BAD JOB

	%
Too many strikes	37
Members too powerful and rich	21
Unions do not keep to their real tasks	12
Unions disrupt national economy	11
Criticism of union leaders	6
Dislike of compulsory membership	4
Other reasons	16
Don't know	3
	<hr/>
Total*	110
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\*Some gave more than one reason.

But it was not only Tory outsiders who condemned the strikes. A case study of a trade unionist was undertaken by Milne and MacKenzie in their book Marginal Seat.<sup>13</sup> Mr. "P" who had consistently voted Labour from 1935 to 1951 changed his allegiance two months before the 1955 Election. One of the reasons he gave was that he thought the trade unions lacked control over their rank and file and could not prevent industrial strife; and secondly that the trade unions had too much

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<sup>12</sup>Mark Abrams, "Socialist Commentary Survey, " Must Labour Lose?, pp. 38-41.

<sup>13</sup>Milne & MacKenzie, Marginal Seat 1955, pp. 183-4.



power in the Labour Party. The extent of his dissatisfaction was such that he not only voted liberal but resigned from his union. Similarly a Gallup Poll taken in August, 1959, indicated that only 55% of trade unionists had sympathy with the strikes occurring in 1958. Thus, at the conclusion of the '50's, dissatisfaction was both widespread, surprisingly widespread, and deep.

The tendency of the general public to tar the Labour Party and the trade unions with the same brush<sup>14</sup> was mentioned earlier. Symptomatic of this tendency the public often conclude the Trade Union Congress and the Annual Conference of the Labour Party are synonymous. The same union leaders, whether they be Cousins, Carron, or Birch figure prominently in both gatherings; the same subjects are discussed and usually the same decisions reached. Perhaps, after all, the public may be forgiven for assuming that the "Conference" and the "Congress" represent one and the same movement. The Parliamentary Labour Party together with the Trade Unions, the Co-operative Society and various socialist societies comprise the "Labour Movement" and in this respect there is a very real sense of unity. Even at the lowest trade union levels the feeling of common identity is strong. When Harrison asked one trade union official whether his union had contributed to the Labour Party's electoral fund, the reply was made in a reproving manner: "But of course we help the Labour Party--

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<sup>14</sup>Gaitskell has no doubts on this score. Speaking at Nottingham he condemned unofficial strikes for (1) alienating public sympathy, and (2) playing the Tory's game for them. The Observer (London) January 28, 1962.



why, they are part of us."<sup>15</sup>

This sense of unity and identity between the Trade Unions and the Labour Party is explicable when one considers the manner in which the Labour Party came into being. It was the political expression of the trade union movement which, prior to the Taff Vale Judgement, had been conservative in attitude and Liberal in politics. The "Judgement" convinced the unions they had "no refuge except the ballot-box and Labour representation."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, at the Trade Union Congress of 1899, trade unionism abandoned its traditional insistence that politics and unionism did not mix and by 546,000 votes to 434,000 instructed its Parliamentary Committee to cooperate with socialist societies and workers' organisations to "devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of Labour members to the next Parliament."<sup>17</sup> For all Keir Hardie's crusading, this action was the deciding factor in the creation of a Labour Party. In later years Ernest Bevin could boast without fear of contradiction: "Our predecessors (in the T. U. C.) formed the Labour Party. It was not Keir Hardie. The Labour Party grew out of the bowels of the Trade Union Congress."<sup>18</sup> Even if the Labour Party had the desire, it would find it exceedingly difficult to deny its background. Its origins are indissolubly linked with and dependent upon the trade

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<sup>15</sup> See Butler and Rose, The British General Election of 1955, (Appendix III) pp. 215-27.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by McKenzie, British Political Parties, p. 386.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Harrison, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Francis Williams, Ernest Bevin (London : Hutchison, 1952) p. 195.





unions. What the Labour Party does seek to deny, however, is the impression that when the Trade Union Movement cracks the whip, the Labour Party comes to heel.

Unfortunately for the electoral image of Labour there is much to sustain this impression from statements made by leading figures in the party during the fifties. In 1954 Sir Charles Geddes (former General Secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers) summed up the position of the trade unions and the Labour Party in such a manner that must have done the Labour Party considerable harm:

The trade unions' influence upon the Party is due to two reasons: (1) money, lots of it, and (2) votes, many of them. This money will be spent and these votes cast in the direction which will further trade union policy.<sup>19</sup>

Reading this, one might suspect that the Labour Party was still the parliamentary pressure group of the trade unions.<sup>20</sup> But such is not the case. Nevertheless the trade unions do have considerable power in the Party.

It is at the Party's Annual Conference that the critics of the Labour Party gain the impression of trade union domination. In an election speech delivered to an association of Women Tories in the 1955 campaign. Lord Hailsham described the Labour Party as, "an

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<sup>19</sup>"The National and English Review, " December, 1954, quoted by M. Harrison, p. 195.

<sup>20</sup>The tendency of the L. R. C. to subordinate itself to the wishes of the union led (1) to Keir Hardie's compromise to name the party LABOUR and (2) which caused the withdrawal of Hyndman's S. D. F. for what he termed: "a Labourism which nobody could define." H. M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, p. 259.



alternative government... manipulated by irresponsible forces seeking to establish control by a system of voting respected by none and understood by few.<sup>21</sup> Presumably the "irresponsible forces" were the trade unions and the "system of voting" which Hailsham could neither respect nor understand was that commonly described as the "block vote." The Conservatives were not alone in voicing such arguments. In the early days of the 1950's, similar attacks on the block vote came from the militant and frequently indignant left. Bevan urged the 1951 Conference at Scarborough "to look at the voting paper for the election of the Executive this week to see how, in the industrial section, you have a travesty of the democratic vote. We are not going to be bullied or intimidated by individual trade union leaders--a handful of them."<sup>22</sup>

While Bevan used a favourite left-wing argument (that the Labour Movement was being run by a couple of reactionary trade union leaders) other left-wingers usually went further and not only condemned the block vote as wrong in principle<sup>23</sup> but also sought to show that it was used contrary to the desires of the union members. "The Labour Movement" declared Barbara Castle in anguish, "is in danger of dying a death of three million cuts--the block votes of four men. Their vote was not representative of the working trade unionist."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>"Labour and the Trade Unions," The Economist, February 12, 1960.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted by Harrison, p. 189.

<sup>23</sup>Attlee obviously doubted this. As he put it: "The main objection is generally less against the method of voting than against the results of voting. Those who make the loudest song about the block vote are significantly silent when it happens to be cast with their own views." C. R. Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup>Made at Brighton, 1953: quoted by Harrison, p. 189.



Naturally not all Labour supporters subscribe to this view. Many right-wingers especially, must have heaved a sigh of relief with Shimwell when he concluded: "Thank Heaven for the Trade Union Movement at this time. Thank heaven for what is often called the block vote. It is keeping the Party steady..."<sup>25</sup> Undoubtedly, the trade unions generally are still considered as one of the stabilising factors in the Party, preventing it from falling into the hands of over-zealous militants from the constituencies. Sidney Webb's comment that: "if the block vote of the trade unions were eliminated it would be impracticable to continue to vest the control of policy in the Labour Party Conference,"<sup>26</sup> would find considerable support today.

Where there is smoke there also is fire. Obviously, any question that has occasioned as much contrary comment as this must be far from simple. A look at the composition of the Annual Party Conference shows that the unions have sufficient power to enable them, if so desired, to dominate the Conference. In the 1956 Conference (the last year for which there are full statistics) the constituency parties and socialist societies held 1,150,000 votes while the trade unions had 5,630,000.<sup>27</sup> By virtue of their voting strength in Conference, the unions are able to decide 18 of the 28 seats on the National Executive.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted by McKenzie, British Political Parties, p. 506.

<sup>27</sup>Harrison, p. 248.

<sup>28</sup>12 seats are specifically assigned to trade unions of the N.E.C. But besides this, 5 women representatives and 1 Treasurer are elected by the whole body of the Conference. With the unions controlling 5/6 of the total Conference vote it follows that none of these 18 representatives can win except with at least 50% of the trade union vote.





But the impression of union domination of and contempt for the Annual Conference is heightened by the fact that, as regards sheer numbers of delegates, the trade unions, despite their voting strength, are always in a minority to the constituency delegates.<sup>29</sup>

	Delegates at Conference			
	Trade Unions		Constituency Parties	
	Actual	Potential	Actual	Potential
1948	501	933	584	658
1950	567	1,048	606	678
1958	627	1,125	641	693

Furthermore, trade union delegates speak less frequently. Normally only about 15% of the speeches are made by trade union delegates.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, despite all this, when the vote is taken, the trade union block descends to silence all discussion and to render the debate irrelevant, if not worthless.

But all the delegates have "block votes" of some form. The point is that some union leaders have bigger blocks. For example the average constituency delegate holds a block of 2,000 votes, whereas the union strength at the conference is distributed as follows:

No. of Unions	Size of Block Vote	No. of votes cast at Conference <sup>31</sup>
32	up to 8,000	109,000
26	9,000 to 49,000	611,000
8	50,000 to 99,000	561,000
12	100,000 plus	4,349,000
		<u>5,630,000</u> Total T. U. vote

<sup>29</sup>Every large union except the Miners sent an undersized delegation; e. g., E. T. U. 5 (28); T. G. W. U. 41 (250); N. U. R. 19(59); A. E. U. 33(127). See McKenzie, British Political Parties, p. 489.

<sup>30</sup>McKenzie, p. 499.

<sup>31</sup>See Harrison, p. 248.



What is even more significant, 6 unions controlled 3,689,000 votes and if need be, could defy the rest of the Labour Movement, although they have only done so once.<sup>32</sup>

Undoubtedly, the block vote at the Party's Annual Conference is Labour's Achilles Heel insofar as it affects its public image. It is open to question whether the block votes of the "Big 6" are in any real way representative of the opinions and desires of their rank and file-- assuming that with the present apathy of the trade unionists they have any opinions. The T.G.W.U. which alone accounts for 1,300,000 votes or 15% of the votes in Conference, has such a diverse membership that it is probably quite impossible to formulate any effective democratic method of representation. Certainly, direct representation of its 5,000 branches at the Party's Annual Conference is out of the question. As a result, the T.G.W.U. delegation, in recent years, has consisted <sup>less</sup> of lay delegates and more of the union's executive officials,<sup>33</sup> thus laying itself open to the charge of being run by a "cabal." But the block vote comes under fire on another point; the trade union delegations are too independent, not only can they decide on issues not previously discussed or decided upon by their union<sup>34</sup> but they can also overrule previous

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<sup>32</sup>At the 1960 "Unilateralist" Conference, and then they had considerable constituency support, as well as that of local left-wing M. P. 's. Supra., Ch. IV.

<sup>33</sup>See Harrison, pp. 130-137.

<sup>34</sup>Gaitskell, when faced with defeat because of a change in the A. E. U. delegations vote concluded: "I sometimes think frankly that the system we have by which the great unions decide their policy before even their conferences can consider the executive recommendation is not a very wise one or a good one." The Times (London) October 6, 1960.



decisions of their union.<sup>35</sup> In addition, there is always the chance of Communist domination of these small delegation groups to be considered. William Carron, President of the A.E.U., speaking on T.V.<sup>36</sup> after his union had, in effect, determined a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament at the Labour Party's Annual Conference, admitted that of the 52 members of the union's policy-making body, 12 were members of the Communist Party and 8 were known fellow travellers. In Carron's view: "There was not the slightest doubt that they were conditioned and would follow a particular (party) line."

The block vote is not the only part of the Trade Union/Labour Party relationship that is criticised and which has helped to tarnish the Labour Party's image as a democratic and progressive party. The Unions' voting strength at the Party's Annual Conference is theirs by virtue of the tremendous financial support they give the party. As far back as 1955 Gaitskell considered "it would be very bad for the Labour Party if its relationship with the unions came to be regarded as predominantly that of the sugar daddy."<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately for the Labour Party that is precisely the light in which many people regard the relationship.

Since the war, trade union contributions to the National General Election fund have consistently amounted to almost 90% of the

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<sup>35</sup>George Cyriax, "Labour and the Trade Unions," Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1960, p. 328.

<sup>36</sup>Reported in The Times, (London) October 6, 1960.

<sup>37</sup>Quoted by Harrison, p. 55.





total.<sup>38</sup>

Sources	Amount Contributed in £ 's				
	1945	1950	1951	1955	1959
Trade Unions	111, 154	156, 178	101, 199	99, 815	325, 678
All Other Sources	14, 284	15, 603	17, 981	5, 065	20, 000 (approx.)
Total	125, 438	171, 781	119, 180	104, 880	345, 678

Besides this, the unions contribute heavily to the Party through affiliation fees, by-election subscriptions and various direct grants so that of the National Labour Party's total income since the war, 80% has been derived from Trade Union sources.<sup>39</sup>

In large measure, much of the unfavourable criticism of the financial dependence of the Labour Party on the Trade Unions stems from the way in which the Trade Unions obtain their political funds. They are raised by the 'Political Levy,' which is complementary to the general union fees. Since 1946, the system of 'contracting-out' has been used whereby the individual union member must specifically state that he does not intend to contribute to the political fund. The present system certainly seems to benefit the finances of the Labour Party. For instance, in 1945, when the 'contracting-in' system was in force, only 2,903,000 trade unionists paid the political levy. By 1947, just 12 months after contracting-out had been introduced, the number had risen to 5,613,000.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>39</sup>See Appendix D.

<sup>40</sup>Harrison, p. 62.





To the public it must appear that the Labour Party is prepared to take advantage of the ordinary trade unionist's apathy, for the sake of financial gain. This seems more reprehensible when figures indicate that many trade unionists are not Labour supporters. It is estimated that no party can win an election without at least one quarter of the trade union votes<sup>41</sup> and the Tories have won the last three General Elections. To the public, encouraged by Tory arguments, it must appear immoral, even somewhat dishonest for the Labour Party to accept such money.

Another area in which the trade unions have damaged Labour's image is in Parliament itself.<sup>42</sup> Much of the aid given by the trade unions to the Labour Party has been in the sponsoring of union parliamentary candidates and in supporting them financially through the election campaign. Consequently, there has always been a large number of trade union M. P. 's in the Parliamentary Labour Party. In the four General Elections of the '50's, their number, in the respective parliaments, was 111, 108, 95 and 92. Despite this gradual decline, the proportion of trade unionists in the P. L. P. has risen because they generally hold safe seats, which are the last to be lost. Thus, the impact of the trade union M. P. 's on the image of the Parliamentary Labour Party has grown. This in itself might not be such a bad thing but for the fact that their quality has fallen. The development led R. H. S. Crossman to remark that, "of the 97 sponsored trade union M. P. 's

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<sup>41</sup>A Gallup Poll taken in 1955 indicated the party preferences of the rank and file trade unions: Labour 59%; Conservatives 25%; Others and Don't Know 16%.

<sup>42</sup>See Harrison, Ch. VI.



only four suggest themselves for key jobs."<sup>43</sup> And this was probably a fair estimate of their capabilities. Too frequently the unions apparently regard the House of Commons as a fitting way to reward faithful union service. It may be appreciated that this practice is not designed to create the image of a dynamic, youthful and progressive party in Parliament. "Sponsoring" does not help the local constituency parties either. Constituency parties with trade union sponsored candidates have few financial worries and become apathetic and complacent.<sup>44</sup> The result is a weakened and often moribund local Labour Party, which in turn harms the local image of the party.

While Labour's very existence as a political party is dependent upon the trade unions' political levy, it is obvious that the relationship is very much of a mixed blessing. In fairness to the trade unions, it should be noted that they have not misused their power. As Harrison points out "the unions have usually been prepared to leave to the political leadership, the initiating of policies which do not directly involve their own interests,"<sup>45</sup> and rarely has their strength been cast solidly in one direction. Nonetheless, Labour has suffered because it has been unable to destroy the image of union control of its Conference ("a Parliament of the Movement") and unwilling to end the association because it has

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted ibid., p. 269.

<sup>44</sup>The strength of this argument is indicated by comparing two constituencies: Barnsley (trade union sponsored candidate) a strong Labour seat, had only 375 members in the local Labour Party, whereas Willesden West (a Tory stronghold) had a very virile local Labour constituency organisation with 6,560 members.

<sup>45</sup>Harrison, p. 336.



not been prepared to discontinue the financial subsidy of the Trade Unions. But the Party has not been united on this. Some have called for an end to the association.<sup>46</sup> The problem though, is how to have this and at the same time keep the Party solvent. One possibility, which at first seems quite improbable, is for the trade unions to take a less active part in the policy deciding bodies of the Labour Party, while at the same time maintaining the present level of financial support. "Recently as Labour's chances in politics have seemed to dwindle, trade union leaders have been turning their attention more and more towards securing rewards from industrial pressure which is, in any case, the type of action which they best understand."<sup>47</sup> The change has also been prompted by the Trade Unions need to recruit from among the growing number of white collar workers<sup>48</sup> and by the fact that all their industrial objectives have been attained.<sup>49</sup> If these developments continue and Mr. George Woodcock, the present General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, is believed to favour such a loosening of the political ties,<sup>50</sup> then it might well be that the degree to which the Labour Party has been embarrassed

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<sup>46</sup>For example, Woodrow Wyatt.

<sup>47</sup>George Cyriax, Political Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 3. See the feature "Strengthening case for looser T.U.C. links with Party," The Times (London) October 7, 1960.

<sup>49</sup>Harrison noted that the 1955 Election was the first in which the reasons advanced by the Unions were primarily political rather than industrial. Butler, The British General Election of 1955, p. 213.

<sup>49</sup>The Times (London) October 7, 1960.

<sup>50</sup>See Harrison, p. 248.





by its association with the trade unions will be reduced, with a consequent beneficial effect on the party's electoral image.



## CHAPTER VI

### REVISIONISM AND THE "DOGMA OF NATIONALISATION"

Nationalisation is one means to an end. The exact boundary of nationalisation must be a matter for democratic decision. One of the things we must take into account in considering the difficult problem is the democratically expressed views of the people in the last three general elections.

Patrick Gordon-Walker, Foreward.

There is, of course, nationalisation. But as an item of future policy this has become a joke and the National Executive of the Labour Party, dancing their elephantine minuet on its grave, know this very well. Yet it is banished, not buried and... The Labour Party intend to keep a lamp burning in the window for the wanderer.

Iain Macleod, The Future of the Welfare State.

Not all Labour commentators were prepared to concede that the party's electoral defeats were explicable solely in terms of the adverse public image the party had incurred through its political activities. In the phraseology of the Pyramid of Causation<sup>1</sup> they believed that the central section of the pyramid - that containing public values and images - had been transformed in so radical a fashion that party activities, of themselves, were not sufficient explanation. Accepting the fact that party disunity, the archaic and disruptive party constitution, and the form of the association with the trade unions had all been considerable factors in Labour's decline, these commentators held that such causes were inadequate as a total explanation. It was true that the party had acquired a bad public image but Labour and its doctrine seemed so out

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 5.



of touch with public attitudes that the only reasonable alternative seemed to be that public values had changed. Furthermore, there were indications that public values had been transformed as a result of changes in the social and economic environment - the base of the Pyramid.<sup>2</sup>

To commentators of this persuasion, the lesson for the Labour Party was clear:

First, it should initiate detailed social surveys to elicit the motives for recent voting behaviour. If these show, as in Britain they probably will, that social trends are now operating against it, then the Party should have one overriding aim over the next three years: to adapt itself, without in any way surrendering basic principles, to the realities of social change, and to present itself to the electorate in a mid-20th-century guise.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the demand was for Labour to so adapt its policy and programme as to harmonise with developments in society, or else run the risk of having its old policies become increasingly irrelevant. The leading advocate of this school of thought was C.A.R. Crosland and he, together with Roy Jenkins and Douglas Jay, became known as the "Hampstead Set" or more simply and derisively as "Revisionists."

Crosland's "revisionist" argument set out to prove just how out of touch the Labour Party was with the social environment. He pointed

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<sup>2</sup>For the other side of the case see R.H.S. Crossman, Labour in the Affluent Society: Fabian Tract 325 (London: The Fabian Society, 1959); "The Spectre of Revisionism," Encounter, Vol. XIV (April 1960), pp. 24-28; Harry Hannon, "Socialism and Affluence," New Left Review, No. 5, September-October 1960, pp. 10-16; John Hughes, "The Commanding Heights," New Left Review, No. 4, July-August 1960, pp. 11-20.

<sup>3</sup>C.A.R. Crosland, "The Future of the Left," Encounter, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (March 1960), p. 5. For a similar appraisal of the "revisionist" position, see Douglas Jay, "Beyond State Monopoly," Where? Fabian Tract 320, pp. 20-5; and Roy Jenkins, The Labour Case (London: Penguin Press, 1959).



out that this was in no way a unique discovery. Soon after 1951, at the successful conclusion of Labour's welfare state programme, many impartial observers had noted that the threat of ideological bankruptcy had arisen in Labour Party ranks.<sup>4</sup> "No one," wrote Crosland, "who has observed the Party since 1951, furiously battling for its lost soul, can have failed to sense a mood of deep bewilderment."<sup>5</sup> It was to dissipate this "deep bewilderment" and to discover Labour's "Lost Soul" that he wrote The Future of Socialism.<sup>6</sup>

In the argument that raged following Labour's defeat in 1951, the extreme left wing of the Party had repeatedly punctuated the debate with demands for more "socialism." "The solution" said the Labour left "lay in the adoption by the Labour Party of a new radical programme, with extensive proposals for further nationalisation well to the foreground."<sup>7</sup> In answer to the arguments of the Labour leadership that the present nationalised industries be improved first, the advocates of nationalisation insisted that so long as "public ownership remained a marginal part of the economy, full advantage of social ownership will be lost."<sup>8</sup> In short, these leftists demanded a return to what they termed

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<sup>4</sup> See Lane Davis, "British Socialism and the Perils of Success," Political Science Quarterly (December 1954), pp. 502-16.

<sup>5</sup> C.A.R. Crosland, The Future of Socialism (London : Jonathan Cape, 1956) p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> In Dalton's opinion, it was "by far the most considerable book on Socialism in English since the war." Altogether "a most important book, brilliant, original and brave." Dalton, High Tide and After, pp. 267 and 412.

<sup>7</sup> Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p. 319.

<sup>8</sup> The TUC Annual Conference Report, 1952, quoted Ibid., p. 323.





"first principles of socialism." But what, asked Crosland, were these "first principles?" No less an authority than Tawney himself admitted that "socialism" was "a word, the connotation of which varies not only from generation to generation, but also from decade to decade."<sup>9</sup> In view of this, Crosland reasoned, the first problem for the left-wing activists to solve was which socialist star should guide them. Presumably, the importance given to "nationalisation" by the left-wing activists stemmed from the Marxist belief in national ownership of the means of production. If such were the case, one might assume the Labour Party doctrine leaned heavily upon Marxism. But as Crosland pointed out, the traditions of the Labour Party contain many streams of socialist thought,<sup>10</sup> of such "variety and heterogeneity" that it is "impossible to isolate any one orthodoxy to be consulted now for guidance about the future."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>R. H. Tawney, Socialist Commentary (May 1952).

<sup>10</sup>Altogether Crosland differentiated 10 streams of socialist thought in British Socialism.

a) The philosophy of natural law, inspired by Locke, belief in common possession.

b) Owenism; co-operation of men in association.

c) Labour Theory of Value; derived from Ricardo, the conflict of class interests.

d) Christian Socialism; evils of competitive capitalism as opposed to the co-operative society of mutual love and brotherhood.

e) Marxism; belief in state ownership in the proletarian state.

f) William Morris; belief in small communes as opposed to the centralised state.

g) The I. L. P. tradition; nonconformist, idealistic, always favouring the underdog.

h) Fabianism; correlating collectivism and efficiency; stressing how the capitalist state could be adapted and used.

i) Syndicalism;

j) Welfare State and the paternalist tradition.

See Crosland, The Future of Socialism. Ch. IV.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 87.



Crosland therefore deduced there was no hallowed formula of any historical validity or of any theoretical applicability which inhibited the development of new socialist theories. Furthermore, Crosland cited Marx's thesis that the various socialist doctrines had themselves been products of a particular kind of society. For example, Marxism was consequent upon nineteenth century capitalism. But as capitalism changes, so must anti-capitalism, that is to say socialism. As Crosland was quick to show, had Marx not been prepared to face the charge of being a revisionist, contemporary socialists would still be labouring under the deficiencies of utopian socialism. Therefore, even revisionism was "hallowed" by an appeal to Marxist tradition.

While Crosland argued the adaptibility of socialism to the particular economic system of the day (which was why he discounted the outmoded dogma of nationalisation) he never exhibited any inclination for Labour to make a complete break with the socialist past. On the contrary, he distinguished, despite the Party's traditional pragmatism, five continuing themes in British socialism:<sup>12</sup>

- a) Protest against poverty.
- b) Protest against the inefficiency of capitalism.
- c) Support for the underdog in terms of social welfare.
- d) Belief in equality and the classless society.
- e) Ideal of human cooperation and the achievement of ends through men in association with men rather than in competition.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., Ch. V.



Of these, Crosland considered the first two were becoming increasingly obsolete in contemporary Britain. Any Labour programme that emphasised "mere negative desires of protest" would be recognised, he declared

as inappropriate by the electorate, a growing section of which has no recollection of unemployment or poverty or dole queues, and finds Labour propaganda which plays on the themes and memories of the 1930's as quite incomprehensible.<sup>13</sup>

Yet these were arguments the leftists used to justify their demands for further nationalisation. Instead, Crosland contended, the modern socialist should be more concerned with the moral and ethical values of society than with outdated Marxist jargon of the "class war" and the "collapse of capitalism."<sup>14</sup>

One of Crosland's strongest arguments against the advocates of further nationalisation was to show its irrelevance in a Britain that belonged to the second half of the Twentieth century. In his view, "one of the errors the Marxists always made... was absurdly to underrate the socio-economic consequences of political democracy."<sup>15</sup> Modern western political institutions had so changed the basis of capitalism, he

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>14</sup>In Crosland's view, "Marx has little or nothing to offer the contemporary socialist, either in respect of practical policy, or of the correct analysis of our society, or even of the right conceptual framework. His prophesies have been almost without exception falsified, and his conceptual tools are now quite inappropriate." Ibid., pp. 20-21. Jay also believes "nationalisation" was another "Marxist cobweb," Where?, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>C.A.R. Crosland, "The Transformation of Capitalism," New Fabian Essays, ed. R.H.S. Crossman (London: Turnstile Press, 1952), p. 35.





suggested, that Marx's "increasing misery" theory could be discounted. Although capitalism had not collapsed, as Marx had prophesied, its powers had been eroded, both at the centre and at the periphery, by the rise of the political and industrial left; the growth of democracy and a social conscience; and, not least, by technical changes in the organisation of capitalism.<sup>16</sup> "It would be curious" concluded Crosland, turning Marx on his head, "if these profound social changes in every part of what Marx called the "super-structure" reflected no fundamental change in the underlying social and economic forces."<sup>17</sup>

At the centre, capitalism had lost control because of the increased role of public authorities and nationalised industries in the nation's economy. Moreover, increased government suspension by means of fiscal policies and monetary controls had restricted the economic freedom of action of the capitalist. It seemed significant that although the Tories had denationalised steel, they maintained sufficient safeguards to ensure effective control of the industry. Control at the periphery had similarly changed. Post-war Britain had experienced a sellers market for labour, and the trade unions had been able to take advantage of this to strengthen their position. In the same period, the

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<sup>16</sup>Such technical changes had been forced on capitalism by the increasing complexity of production. This meant that decisions rested more with the industrial experts than with capitalist amateurs. There had also been the growth of Joint Stock Corporations, headed by salaried managers, as a result of increased competition. Furthermore, due to increased prosperity, the power of the banks and finance houses had declined. Thus companies were freer than before of capital control. See Crosland, The Future of Socialism, pp. 32-5.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 67.



British economy had been inflationary, which is always a factor in improving the financial position of wage earners as opposed to salary earners; and this had resulted, so Crosland maintained, in a reduction of differentials between the classes. The net result was a capitalism so weakened that Crosland wondered whether one could still describe Britain's economic system as "capitalist" in that "no ruling class exists in the narrow Marxist or economic sense."<sup>18</sup> In other words, the economic control of the means of production was no longer the preserve of one particular class. The rise of political democracy had deprived the case for public ownership or nationalisation of its most cogent argument, for it had shown that political control was far more significant than actual ownership.

The point that Crosland was at pains to make - that "nationalisation" was not an integral part of British socialism - was by no means anathema to the Labour Party. While the Labour Government was still in office it became clear that the party leadership was already hesitant about the advisability of further nationalisation of specific industries. Those first nationalised, the coal mines and the railways, were already showing signs that in practice their particular form of nationalisation was far from perfect. When Ernest Bevin became an "elder statesman" after leaving the Foreign Office in 1951, he confided in Francis Williams that it was his intention "to come back and take a look at the nationalised industries to see if he could find some way to make them more human."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>19</sup>Francis Williams, Ernest Bevin (London : Hutchinson, 1952), p. 271.



With this attitude prevalent among the top leaders it is not surprising that the Executive, faced with the demand to "draw up a list of the key and major industries to be taken into public ownership,"<sup>20</sup> adopted an ambiguous position. Challenge to Britain, the 1952 policy statement, ignored the previous year's demand for a detailed list of industries to be nationalised, and re-emphasised the need for further investigation and research; in other words it urged procrastination and almost as a palliative, included two concrete proposals for the "re-nationalisation" of steel and road transport. But this, in Miliband's view, "soon became the well gnawed bone which the leadership regularly threw to the hungry activists, as a token of the leadership's belief in public ownership."<sup>21</sup>

Apparently, at this early stage of the Fifties, the Labour Party, or at least the majority leadership, had given up the idea of complete public ownership of the national economy. According to Miliband, himself a left-wing sympathist, the "consolidators" - the "revisionist" leadership - were well in the saddle in the early Fifties. Gaitskell's accession to the position of party leader merely accentuated the shift to the right which had begun long before, and helped to give it a much sharper ideological and political articulation.<sup>22</sup> Yet the fact that the Labour Party had already gone far towards accepting the mixed economy is undeniable. In Labour and the New Society (1950), described as "a statement of the policy and principles of British democratic socialism,"

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<sup>20</sup>Made in the 1952 Annual Conference, quoted in Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p. 320.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 332.





the Labour Party officially declared that "private enterprise has a proper place in the economy."<sup>23</sup> Two years later, confirmation of this proposition came from the unlikely source of Aneurin Bevan. "It is clear to the serious student of modern politics," he wrote,

that a mixed economy is what most people of the West would prefer. The victory of socialism need not be universal to be decisive. I have no patience with the socialists, so-called, who in practice would socialise nothing, while in theory they threaten the whole of private property. They are purists and therefore barren. It is neither prudent, nor does it accord with our conception of the future, that all forms of private property should live under perpetual threat. In almost all types of human society, different forms of property have lived side by side... Where the frontier between the public and private sector should be fixed, is a question that will be answered differently in different nations.<sup>24</sup>

If, however, the acceptance of the mixed economy had been so general in the early Fifties, one is bound to question how the "Nationalisation Bogey" was established and built up? How was it, that after the 1959 election Douglas Jay are so sure nationalisation was to blame?

The word "nationalisation," he wrote, "has become damaging to the Labour Party. This is a fact; and it is no use denying it, even if you deplore it... The myth that we intended to nationalise everything was very powerful in this election... We must destroy this myth decisively; otherwise we may never win again..."<sup>25</sup>

The significant word used by Jay is "myth" which infers two things: a) that while based on the semblance of fact, it was fundamentally false;

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<sup>23</sup>Quoted in H. G. Nicholas, The British General Election of 1950 (London : MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1951) Ch. VI.

<sup>24</sup>Aneurin Bevan, In Place of Fear (London : William Heinemann Ltd., 1952) p. 118.

<sup>25</sup>Douglas Jay, Foreward, November 1959, p. 16.





and b) that it was widely believed by the general public.

Throughout the Fifties, the most powerful factor in the development of the myth of nationalisation was the distressingly ambiguous position the Labour Party leaders adopted on the question. It has been shown that from the early Fifties, the Labour Party had been officially committed to a mixed economy. Due, however, to the manner in which the National Executive chopped and changed its policy, in an effort to satisfy both sides, nationalisation continued to loom as a vague, but nevertheless "dangerous" threat. In 1950 sugar and cement were slated for nationalisation but did not reappear in the subsequent elections. By way of innovation, Labour's election manifesto of 1955 proposed to take the chemical and machine tool industries under public ownership; but these proposals did not appear in 1959.<sup>26</sup> Only the nationalisation of water and the re-nationalisation of road transport and steel were consistently advocated.<sup>27</sup> "Such a bizarre performance naturally suggests to the public that the Party either suffers from complete mental confusion on the matter, or else wants to nationalise any industry, without caring which, out of doctrinaire attachment to a shibboleth."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>It is not difficult to understand why the proposal to nationalise the chemical industry was so hurriedly dropped. The Labour seat of Cleveland had a high proportion of the electorate who were either employees or dependents of employees working for Imperial Chemical Industries. Significantly, Labour's majority was reduced from 5,481 in the 1951 election to 181 in 1955. See "Why the Conservatives Won," The Economist, Vol. CLXXV (June 4, 1955), pp. 839-42.

<sup>27</sup>See Butler's British General Election series for 1951, 1955 and 1959.

<sup>28</sup>C.A.R. Crosland, Can Labour Win : Fabian Tract 324 (London : The Fabian Society, 1960), p. 15.



In 1957, Industry and Society was produced to resolve all conflict on the question of nationalisation. But it was a compromise of the worst sort, and protagonists of both sides recognised it as such. Crossland condemned the vaguely threatening references to the "600 largest companies" and submitted that such compromises could be "exceedingly dangerous, since they are differently interpreted by different people and hence cause complete uncertainty in the public mind."<sup>29</sup> Miliband made a similar observation from the other side when he criticised the actions of erstwhile Bevanite leaders who "argued that provided it was properly interpreted, a bold nationalisation programme could be extracted from it." But as Miliband pointed out, "the (Bevanite) argument failed to take into account the fact that the interpretation of the document" would be left to the revisionists and the consolidators.<sup>30</sup> Thus the policy statement, in attempting to be all things to all men, failed dismally, and heavily reinforced public uncertainty of Labour's intentions.

The general public's doubts of Labour's intentions concerning nationalisation were ruthlessly exploited by the anti-nationalisation campaigns of various industrial firms, prior to the 1959 Election.<sup>31</sup> Although the campaigns claimed to be non-political and emphasised "It's not your vote we ask for, it's your voice,"<sup>32</sup> Butler considers the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, pp. 333-4.

<sup>31</sup>For a full account of the role of private industry in the anti-nationalisation campaigns see Butler and Rose, The British General Election of 1959, pp. 241-55.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted ibid., p. 249.



appeal was blatantly half false. Furthermore, the fact that steel nationalisation was in Labour's programme made the advertisements political, in his opinion.<sup>33</sup> Also, while the drive of private enterprise against nationalisation was separate from the activities of the Conservative Party "it was not...unwelcome to Central Office, who might otherwise have felt compelled to devote more attention to the subject."<sup>34</sup> While it is quite probable that the majority of the electorate were already dissatisfied with nationalisation, there can be little doubt that the anti-nationalisation campaigns kept the nationalisation issue alive. They were conducted with great intensity and, by political standards, at a prodigious cost. For instance, Butler and Rose estimated that between

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>34</sup>Butler considers "there was a subtle but important distinction between the aims of the business groups and of the Conservative Party in their advertising campaigns. Both wished to defeat the Labour Party, which could only be done by returning the existing government. But in the long run the spokesmen for private industry wishes to force the Labour Party to alter its programme so that it would not threaten their interests; the Conservatives were more concerned with building up the long-term appeal of their own party...They (the industrialists) were far keener to emphasise nationalisation in their propaganda than the Conservatives, who preferred to concentrate on the positive achievements of their years in office rather than on a negative issue." Ibid., p. 243.

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% of addresses mentioning "Nationalisation".		
Election	Conservative	Labour
1951	43*	20
1955	52	36
1959	13	40

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\*Besides, the denationalisation of Iron and Steel appeared in 52% of Addresses, and denationalisation of Road Haulage in 18%. The table gives





June 1958 and September 1959 vested interests spent ~~£~~ 1,435,000 on publicity which was "politically relevant." It similarly cannot be denied that they embarrassed the Labour Party because of its ambiguous stand on the question. Even when Labour counter-attacked, as it did over the statistical efficacy of the Colin Hurry Poll<sup>35</sup> and again in a radio broadcast devoted entirely to a denunciation of the "faceless men" (viz. the Institute of Directors) "these... discussions hurt Labour by emphasising that the Party was disunited on a major item of its policy."<sup>36</sup>

This however was not the real significance of the campaigns. The fact is, that as a political policy, nationalisation was disliked and had been discarded by the electorate. Thus the importance of the anti-nationalisation campaigns derived from the fact that they kept the most unfavourable facet of the Labour Party programme constantly before the public. Their success may be measured by the Gallup Poll which reported that 20% of people interviewed after the Election considered nationalisation to be one of the major causes of Labour's defeat. Yet barely two months before, only 6% of the sample mentioned nationalisation as a major issue.<sup>37</sup>

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definite proof that the Conservatives were taking a far less active role in the campaign against nationalisation and allowing extra-parliamentary forces (e. g. the Institute of Directors) to do the "dirty work." Obviously this was of considerable electoral benefit to the Tories for it forced Labour to defend itself without being able to counter-attack its parliamentary number.

<sup>35</sup>For full Labour arguments see The British General Election of 1959, p. 245-6.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>37</sup>Quoted ibid., p. 255.



Socialist Commentary was so disturbed by the nature of Labour's defeat that it initiated a social survey "to establish what were the attitudes which (had) led the electorate to turn away steadily from the Labour Party over the past ten years."<sup>38</sup> Despite Labour's condemnation of the Colin Hurry Poll, Mark Abrams' findings were even more damning of Labour's nationalisation policy.

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Views on publically-owned industries<sup>39</sup>

(a) Conservative supporters

Industry	Success %	Failure %	No difference %	Don't know %	%
Electricity	44	20	22	14	= 100
Atomic energy	40	6	5	49	
Airlines	31	13	7	49	
Gas	31	26	23	20	
Coal	16	60	13	11	
Railways	11	69	8	12	
Average	<u>29</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>26</u>	

(b) Labour supporters

Industry	Success %	Failure %	No difference %	Don't know %	%
Electricity	57	10	17	16	= 100
Airlines	41	2	5	52	
Gas	39	17	16	28	
Atomic energy	38	2	6	54	
Coal	38	40	11	11	
Railways	25	49	12	14	
Average	<u>40</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>29</u>	

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<sup>38</sup>Mark Abrams, Richard Rose, Must Labour Lose? (London : Penguin Books, 1960), p. 9.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



- a) Of all the nationalised industries only electricity was considered a success in any real sense. However, only coalmining and the railways were emphatically condemned as failures. The interesting conclusion to be drawn from these results is the fact that people seemed to make their judgements less on ideological grounds than on a pragmatic basis, insofar as apologists of both parties were prepared to distinguish between successes and failures.

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Views on publicly-owned industries<sup>40</sup>

All respondents

Industry	Success %	Failure %	No difference %	Don't know %	
Electricity	50	16	19	15	= 100
Atomic energy	39	5	5	51	
Airlines	35	9	6	50	
Gas	33	22	20	25	
Coal	25	52	12	11	
Railways	16	62	10	12	
Average	<u>33</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>27</u>	

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- b) It is also significant that there were a large proportion of "Don't Knows" and "no difference" opinions expressed. Almost 40% of the sample had no definite opinion either for or against nationalisation. Apparently, if one can make such an assumption, the nationalised industries had, for a large proportion of the public, so merged into the general socio-economic pattern of the nation that they were no longer issues of interest. Many people had accepted them; they had become part of the status quo, and were outside the field of political contention. The point for Labour would seem to

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 33.



be that "nationalisation" as a policy had lost its relevance for a considerable proportion of the population.

More industries publically owned? <sup>41</sup>						
Answers	Cons.		Labs.		Whole Sample	
	1949 %	1959 %	1949 %	1959 %	1949 %	1959 %
Yes	5	3	60	21	27	11
No	87	84	19	58	55	75
Don't know	8	13	21	21	18	14

c) But the most dangerous sign for Labour was that there had been a real shift in opinion against "nationalisation" during the Fifties and that most of this had been within the ranks of Labour supporters. If nationalisation was held in such low repute by Labour supporters, it follows that it must have been significant in denying Labour much of the "floating vote" that throughout the Fifties had been gravitating towards the Liberals and ultimately to the Tories.

The Labour Party, however, was not blind to this development.

Several leading figures had taken note of it and had urged action to prevent the drift of the marginal voters away from Labour. In the 1957 Conference, Gaitskell rejected a demand for further nationalisation with the excuse that the "so-called marginal voters" had to be considered. He said that the Executive could have come to the Conference with a full list of industries for nationalisation and that this would have been passed with acclamation by the Conference. But this action had not been taken, declared Gaitskell

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<sup>41</sup>This is a composite table based on the Socialist Commentary Survey of 1959 (Must Labour Lose? p. 35) and a survey undertaken by Research Services between 1948 and 1950. The comparisons are not completely accurate because of the different nature of the samples. Nevertheless, the implications for Labour seem clear.





because if we had done so, we would have been putting something to you...which in our hearts we believed the electorate were bound to reject... We do not believe in that sort of leadership; we believe in leadership which is clear eyed and clear headed, which does not flinch from making the Party and the Movement face the facts of the day, both the economic and the political facts.<sup>42</sup>

Such a categoric denial of the basic doctrine of nationalisation was something novel to the Party. It was a statement which attained greater significance as the Fifties came to a close. The 1959 Conference approved a statement of Labour Party aims for the Second half of the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> It called, in most moderate terms, for "community power over the commanding heights of the economy," and also recognised that "both public and private enterprise have a place in the economy." Thus by the end of the Fifties, the concept of nationalisation was very much watered down.<sup>44</sup> Gradually the Party had been educated to Gaitskell's political recipe which

had been to place the ear to the ground, to listen, to learn and then to formulate the party's policy in accordance with the mood of the nation... Nothing could be further from the traditional socialist habit of

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<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p. 335.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>44</sup>But the Labour Party could still not claim that it had buried the "nationalisation bogey." Public fears were awakened by a speech of R. H. S. Crossman in 1961 in which he claimed Labour chiefs were looking toward industries as yet unborn for their future nationalisation programmes. "Those who thought we were going to abandon socialism," he said "will find new forms of public ownership, new applications of our principles in terms of the realities of the 1960's." He also made what the correspondent considered to be a "highly" significant remark when he said that the Labour Party would not again make the mistake of taking over a "lot of junk." See Peter Lyne, "British Socialists Ponder," The Christian Science Monitor (Boston) March 28, 1961.



bringing down from the mountains the tablets of stone.<sup>45</sup>

There was still, however, a minority of these traditional socialists in the Party which did not realise that the old phrases were losing their potency, that old dogmas were losing their relevance and that the social environment of the country was changing.<sup>46</sup> This was the danger for Labour; so long as the leftist group, continued to operate, it was still possible for Labour to destroy itself in blind, paralytic loyalty to outmoded doctrines. Despite the bitter lessons of the Fifties, and the arguments of the revisionists, the Labour Party in the sixties still had not laid to rest the "bogey of nationalisation."

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<sup>45</sup>"Labour in the Wilderness," The Round Table, Vol. L, p. 125.

<sup>46</sup>Typical of this group was Connie Zilliacus. In the early Fifties, he was one of the most outspoken critics of the "consolidation" policy in the Labour Party. Yet his stand apparently had no popular following when one considers the opinion of his electorate in 1955. His almost rock-solid seat of Manchester Gorton had its 1951 majority of 7,948 reduced to 269. Undeterred, Zilliacus continued on his "leftist" way. "Why the Conservatives Won," The Economist (June 4, 1955) p. 839-42.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE WORKING CLASS

The whole working class finds itself on the move, moving towards new middle-class values and a middle class existence. When I compare the situation (in 1960) with what I saw ten years ago, the change can only be described as a deep transformation of values, as the development of new ways of thinking and feeling, a new ethos, new aspirations and cravings... I am dealing with the tendencies and trends arising out of the fabric of the new full-employment, Welfare State and the gadgets of the new age.

Ferdinand Zweig, Twentieth Century.

A belief that the traditional class structure was breaking down and considerably modifying class consciousness had led the Revisionists to advocate a radical change in Labour Party policy. They recognized that Labour's appeal was becoming increasingly less attractive as a result of changes taking place in the economic and social environment. Crosland argued:

The Party's defeat (in 1959) was due to its failure to recognise and welcome the transformation of our society... Some of the Party's old style policies are thought (rightly) to be irrelevant to present day conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere he concluded: "The image of the Labour Party... has become steadily less appropriate to changing social conditions : this fundamentally explains the decline of the Labour Party over the last decade."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. A. R. Crosland, "On the Left Again," Encounter, October 1960, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Crosland, Can Labour Win?, P. 18.





Douglas Jay expressed the same belief in somewhat similar terms. "We set out," he said, "to transform society. We succeeded so well that now we have to transform ourselves."<sup>3</sup> Nor were these opinions held only by individual theoreticians crying in the wilderness. Gaitskell himself admitted after the results of the 1959 Election that Labour would have to re-think its policies and attitudes in contemporary terms.<sup>4</sup>

The social changes recognised by the Revisionists were particularly relevant to the Labour Party insofar as they affected the composition and solidarity of the working class--the traditional stronghold of the Labour Party vote. In Crosland's opinion "the steady up-grading of the working class, both occupationally and still more in terms of social aspirations, renders Labour's one class image increasingly inappropriate."<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that to some at least, developments in the social environment and the policy of the Labour Party were not in harmony. But it is an acknowledged fact that any society is subject to constant and continual change. Within this the political party must seek to survive. As Rose somewhat colourfully puts it;

The two parties are rival navies cruising a vast ocean... Just as navies, while fighting in one sea, never actually sail through the same water twice, so political parties find that even when they try to stay still, it means anchoring in a society changing and renewing itself like the waters of an ocean.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Douglas Jay, Foreward, November 1959, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>See "The General Election," The Round Table, Vol. L, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup>Crosland, Encounter, October 1960, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Abrams & Rose, Must Labour Lose?, p. 61.



This was the fault of the Labour Party. It attempted during the Fifties to anchor itself to the one constant factor in a shifting society--its socialist doctrine; only to discover that society, like time, "waiteth for no man."

Ironically, social change during the Fifties was singularly meaningful for the Labour Party, because it was preceded by the social welfare legislation of the Labour Government during the late Forties. By 1950 the social reform programme had had two important consequences; the elimination of poverty as a considerable factor in British society and the redistribution and equalisation of personal incomes.

### Elimination of Poverty

In 1936 Seebohm Rowntree undertook a survey of York and discovered that 31% of the working class population and 18% of the total population were living in poverty. Furthermore, serious malnutrition prevailed amongst nearly one-third of the population, and malnutrition to a lesser degree amongst over one-half. And York, be it noted, was neither a slum city nor a distressed area. Another survey, using similar methods, was conducted in 1950 (with suitable allowances being made for changes in the price level to enable the results to be directly comparable). This second survey revealed that only 3% of the working class and 1.6% of the total population were living in poverty.<sup>7</sup> Thus projecting these figures onto a national scale and recognising the inherent difficulties of

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<sup>7</sup>The full findings and commentary on these surveys may be found in B. Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty and Progress (London: Longmans, 1941) and B. Seebohm Rowntree and G. R. Lavers' Poverty and the Welfare State (London: Longmans, 1951.)



such a multiple correlation analysis, it might be stated as a rough estimate that nine-tenths of the pre-war poverty had been eradicated by the conclusion of the Forties. Considering that real national income during the Fifties increased by approximately 20% and that this was shared on at least a proportional basis by the working class<sup>8</sup> it seems reasonable to assume that by 1959 the percentage of the population living below the poverty line had been even further reduced. Crosland believed in 1956 that it was then possible to say, almost conclusively, that primary poverty had been banished.<sup>9</sup>

#### Redistribution of Personal Incomes

If the elimination of poverty was important as part of a policy of social welfare then the redistribution of personal incomes was prominent as a cardinal feature of socialist policy.<sup>10</sup> In 1938 there was no doubt that Britain was an "unequal" nation. Almost 20 million people existed on incomes of less than £ 250 per annum, while 8,000 had incomes of £ 10,000 or more.<sup>11</sup> Labour considerably modified this gross iniquity

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<sup>8</sup>Abrams and Rose, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup>Crosland was quick to point out however, that the whole nation could not be dismissed out of hand. Secondary poverty due to ignorant and imprudent spending of earnings and amongst the aged and infirm, still remained. Also the poverty line (that defining primary poverty) had been very stringently drawn, allowing a family of five only 6/8d. on drink, tobacco, holidays, travel, gifts, books, etc. See The Future of Socialism, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup>Incidentally, it also helped to finance the social welfare legislation in Labour's programme. Thus it could be considered a case of killing two birds with one stone.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted Crosland, The Future of Socialism, p. 47.





by making direct taxation markedly more progressive.

Comparing direct taxation; 1938-1950<sup>12</sup>

<u>Income in £ 's</u>	<u>Increase of tax rates in £ 's</u>
500	28
1,000	98
10,000	2,280

The net results of these policies:

i. e. ,        a) the raising of the lower levels of the population by the introduction of basic welfare facilities;

              b) the equalisation of personal incomes by the establishment of a steeper rate of progressive taxation;

was a movement away from a society where great extremes of wealth and poverty could exist, towards a more cohesive society in which income groups would be closer together and where it would be possible to move from one income group up to another with greater facility.

### Post-War Prosperity

One should continually bear in mind that the concept of the welfare state was less to change society radically, than to mitigate its worst evils. In addition, government legislation can do only so much in changing society. The really great transformations are usually self-induced. However, to complement and accentuate the changes that had already taken place in society there occurred the post-war boom. In the Fifties, Britain experienced a prosperity never before known. Unemployment was reduced to such a level as to be insignificant by pre-war standards and

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 50.





people began to accept it as the normal state of affairs.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, personal incomes, caught up in the inflationary spiral, rose to astronomical heights.

While the increased prosperity was universal it did not have an equal application. Some sectors of the community developed at a faster rate than others and some groups were more fortunate than others in reaping the inflationary harvest. As is usually the case, the wage earners, because of their trade union organisations, were more able to take advantage of post-war conditions. By 1950, a definite trend reflecting this was already apparent.

Personal Incomes as % of Total National Income <sup>14</sup>		
	1938	1950
Wages	39	47
Salaries	25	25
Self-employment	15	14
Property Incomes (Rent, Dividends and Interest)	19	11
Armed Services, etc.	2	3
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Assuming that the category of self-employed could also be considered to consist of property owners, the real change between pre-war and post-war Britain was the transference of 9% of the disposal national income from property owners to wage earners, who might be assumed to be

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<sup>13</sup>The average of unemployed during the pre-war period fluctuated between 1.5 and 2 million. Since the war it has never risen higher than 550,000 and this only temporarily for a 2 month period. Significantly, no less a person than the Conservative Prime Minister admitted that an unemployment rate of 3% would bring down the government.

<sup>14</sup>Crosland, The Future of Socialism, p. 49.



basically working class. Hence, the wage-earning working class not only became more prosperous in real economic terms but it also became more affluent in relation to other classes in the community. Although the development was not maintained at the same level during the Fifties, earned incomes, nevertheless, continued to rise at a faster rate than property incomes. As a result, personal income differentials were even further reduced.

	% Increase of Personal Incomes based on 1948 <sup>15</sup>	
	1957	1958
Wages	85	86
Salaries	102	115
Self-employment	35	39
Property Incomes	69	84

#### Changed Pattern of Employment : Increase of Salary Earners

One very significant fact emerges from the table. While earned incomes rose by nearly 90% in the period 1948-58, salaries increased at a far more considerable rate than wages (in 1958, 115 compared to 86).

The Economic Report explains that the phenomenon was due to the increased proportion of salary earners in the Fifties.<sup>16</sup> For example, between 1953 and 1960 the number of workers employed in "wage-earning" jobs rose by 2.5% while, in the same period, workers who received salaries rose by 24.5%.<sup>17</sup> In part, the increase of salary earners during the Fifties was due to the re-orientation of British industry to cope with post-war conditions. The Economic Report says that the radical transformation of

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<sup>15</sup>Data taken from the Economic Record (U. K. Information Service), Vol. 12, No. 9 (October 1959) and Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 1960).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., October 1958.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., Vol. 16, No. 2 (February-March 1962).



Britain's industrial scene was prompted in large measure by inventions and technological advances but the most important factor was the need for Britain to adapt its economy to the many changes in world trading conditions. The result of Britain's "adaptation" was an increase of service and tertiary industries and the consequent decline of the basic industries of primary production.

Changes in employment 1948-58 <sup>18</sup>  
Industries growing faster than average  
(Average = +8 per cent)

	Per cent change
Professional services	+37
Vehicles	+29
Paper and printing	+25
Food, drink and tobacco	+24
Distribution	+24
Chemicals	+20
Engineering, shipbuilding and electrical goods	+20
Other manufactures	+18
Gas, electricity and water	+18
Insurance, banking and finance	+18
Precision instruments, jewellery, etc.	+17
Industries growing slower than average	
Non-metalliferous mining products	+ 5
Building and contracting	+ 4
Metal goods	+ 1
Wood and cork	nil
Industries with declining employment	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	-21
Leather, leather goods and fur	-19
Miscellaneous services	-13
Public administration	- 6
Transport and communications	- 4
Textiles	- 4
Mining and quarrying	- 3
Clothing	- 1

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Vol. 14, No. 2 (February 1960).





It is indicative that industries experiencing the largest rate of growth were those which largely employed non-manual, black-coated or white-collar workers (for the sake of discussion these terms are used synonymously). In other words, industries which provided employment for the non-manual workers, generally regarded as being either lower middle class or skilled working class, became a more predominant element of the nation's economy. Concurrently, there was a very real decline of the numbers employed in basic industries, traditionally regarded as unequivocally working class and assumed to comprise politically of strong Labour supporters.

While the pattern of employment changed consequent upon the change in the distribution of various industries, a transformation was also taking place in the individual industries. Not only were "non-manual, white collar" industries occupying a large sector of the economy, but the employment pattern as regards salary and wage earners was also changing. As a result, individual industries in the Fifties tended to have an increasingly higher proportion of non-manual employees.

Non manual employees as % of total no. of employees<sup>19</sup>

	1948	1954	1956	1957
All industries	14.6	16.8	17.7	18.2
Manufacturing	16.3	18.6	19.7	20.2
Chemical	27.6	30.3	31.2	32.1
Engineering (shipbuilding & electrical)	19.5	22.6	23.5	24.2
Vehicles	16.7	19.5	21.6	22.4
Textiles	9.2	10.7	11.6	11.7
Paper & printing	21.3	22.9	23.5	24.0
Mining & Quarrying	4.9	6.1	6.6	7.1
Building	9.2	10.6	10.8	11.2
Utilities (gas, water & electricity)	2.50	28.4	29.2	29.5

<sup>19</sup>See "The Growing Electoral Importance of Black Coated Workers," The Times (London), September 28, 1959.



The increase of these white collar workers was very general. As the table shows they were not confined to the newer service and manufacturing industries. Such basic industries as mining and quarrying also showed that the white collar element was on the increase. In actual numbers, between 1948 and 1957, non-manual workers increased by 636, 148, a 48% increase, while the number of manual workers increased by 928, 025, but only a 12% increase.<sup>20</sup> The picture is somewhat clearer when painted in proportionate terms. Whereas in 1948, 16.0% of the population had white-collar, non-manual occupations, by 1958 the proportion of white-collar workers had risen to 21.2%. Similarly, the proportion of manual workers was 84% in 1948 and 78.8% in 1958.<sup>21</sup>

#### Implications for the Labour Party

Bonham pointed out that in 1931 the middle class-of non-manual workers-comprised of 7, 850, 000 adults or 27.1% of the population. By 1951, he estimated that this had increased to 10, 400, 000 or some 30.4%.<sup>22</sup> But one of the first political observers to comprehend the importance of this changed employment pattern and to relate it to class consciousness and the decline of the Labour vote was H. A. Turner.<sup>23</sup> Rejecting the suggestion that the electoral "swing" was explicable in terms of individual changes of opinion, he submitted it involved "an underlying change in the character of the electorate itself." Dealing, on his own admission, with

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>"Non-Manual Workers," Report of the 23rd Conference, 1960 (London : T. U. C., 1960), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>John Bonham, The Middle Class Vote (London : Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 113.

<sup>23</sup>"Labour's Diminishing Vote," The Guardian (Manchester), October 20, 1959.



the very broad trends, he estimated that between 1951 and 1959 the "salariat" increased from 30.4% to 34% of the adult population (i.e. the part enjoying the franchise, and the only relevant section considering his intent to correlate these figures with election results). Thus, he reasoned, the figures suggested a steady annual swing of 0.5% of the working population from manual (wages) to white-collar (salaried) employment. And this, he pointed out, "coincides pretty closely with the apparent "swing" of voters away from the Labour Party."<sup>24</sup> In Turner's opinion

For a decade or so, the Labour Party might still win an election from its present standing as the manual workers' traditional protector ... But in a generation or thereabouts manual workers will themselves be a minority of the voting population.<sup>25</sup>

Speculation of this kind was certain to cause considerable apprehension amongst Labour leaders who realised how much their party depended upon the votes of the manual working class. The shock of the 1959 defeat was sufficient to bring these hidden fears into the open. Douglas Jay in his Foreword article was one of the first to publically express misgivings which were obviously widespread in the Labour Party.

The better-off wage earners and numerous salary earners are tending to regard the Labour Party as associated with a class to which they themselves no longer belong. Few of them--least of all the women--feel themselves to be members of a "working class." We

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<sup>24</sup>This is perhaps Turner's weakest interpretation. Between 1945 and 1950, and between 1951 and 1959 Labour lost approximately 2% of the total votes cast (i.e. an average annual decline of 1/2 %). However, Turner suggests the real decline was masked by varying Liberal interventions in the elections. The number of Liberal candidates was: 1945, 300; 1950, 475; 1951, 109; 1955, 110; 1959, 217. See Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.





are in danger of fighting under the label of a class that no longer exists (italics mine). . .<sup>26</sup>

The reason for discomfort in Labour circles was due to the fact that the Labour Party was unquestionably associated in the public mind with the working class. The Socialist Commentary Survey<sup>27</sup> indicated that among Labour and Conservative supporters alike, the statement "Stands mainly for the working class!" was unerringly tagged to the Labour Party.

Five Statements Most Typical of the Labour Party<sup>28</sup>

	% Labour supporters	% Cons. supporters
Stands mainly for the working class	89	61
Is out to help the underdog	75	41
Would extend public services	64	37
Is out to raise the living standards of the ordinary people	62	20
Would try to abolish class differences	55	34

Nor was the identification of the Labour Party with the working class merely an attitude of mind. It had considerable basis in fact. Bonham

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<sup>26</sup>Jay, Foreward, November 1959, p. 16. His reference to the attitude of women on political matters is particularly interesting. Undoubtedly they have shown a far greater tendency towards Conservatism (perhaps due to their more materialistic nature.) A survey taken during a by-election in a Liverpool constituency revealed some startling contrasts.

% of men and women voting Conservative

a) Age Groups	M.	W.	b) Income Groups	M.	W.
21-30	17	42	Under £10 p.w.	23	30
30-40	29	34	£10 - £20 p.w.	34	40
40-60	47	49	£20 p.w. & over	43	75
60 & over	34	66			

Figures taken from "The Garston Survey," prepared by the Liverpool Fabian Society, May 1958 (mimeographed).

<sup>27</sup>See Abrams & Rose, Must Labour Lose?

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-16





estimated that of the 14 million votes Labour received in 1951, almost 11.3 million came from the class of manual wage earners.<sup>29</sup> Such an overwhelming dependence upon one group in the community is hardly healthy at the best of times. When that group--the manual wage earners in the case of the Labour Party--shows signs of losing its monolithic nature, then the Labour Party's concern for its future is hardly reprehensible. Labour is not, nor has it ever been, a one class party but undoubtedly its electoral base is very closely tied to the working classes as the following table indicates.<sup>30</sup>

Social Class and Voting				
Group	% of population	Conservative	% Labour	% Others
Solid middle class	15	85	10	5
Lower (non-manual) middle class	20	70	25	5
Upper (manual) working class	30	35	60	5
Solid working class	35	30	65	5

#### Changes in Working Class Attitudes

Important as these real changes in Britain's economic structure were, they do not, in isolation, give the whole picture. There was general movement of persons in the "skilled workers" category into the salary earners and staff grouping: that is, from a class predominantly Labour in its politics to a class whose voting habits were less established and

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<sup>29</sup>Bonham, pp. 172-4.

<sup>30</sup>Mark Abrams, "Class Distinctions in Britain, " The Future of the Welfare State (London : Conservative Political Centre 1958), p. 72.



more likely to ebb and flow with economic circumstances.<sup>31</sup> But of equal importance for the Labour Party, distinctly middle class habits and attitudes developed among those persons who by any socio-economic classification (such as the "Hall-Jones Scale") could still be defined as working class.

Thus Labour faced a dual challenge to its working class vote. The upper level of the working class, that generally consisting of skilled workers, was being eroded by its adoption of non-manual middle class jobs and thus cutting its traditional class ties. Simultaneously, the class consciousness of the lower strata of the working class appeared to be disintegrating as a result of the welfare state and the nationalistic benefits of post-war prosperity. This was the development Jay was referring to when he said: "We (the Labour Party) set out to get rid of class consciousness. We succeeded so well that we are surprised to find so many wage earners no longer respond to a class-conscious-appeal." The dreaded prospect facing the Labour Party was that British society would develop along the same lines as society in the United States. There, a Gallup Poll had discovered that whereas 88% of the people considered themselves to be middle class, only 6% would admit to being lower class. In 1953 Gallup Poll asked a British sample to classify themselves. No fewer than 49% described themselves as middle class compared with 46% who believed themselves to be working class.<sup>32</sup> The prospect also

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<sup>31</sup>See Butler & Rose, The British General Election of 1959, Ch. 11.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Andrew Grant, Socialism and the Middle Classes (London : Lawrence & Wishart, 1958), p. 7.



threatening Labour's future was that the element which remained economically working class would no longer think in working class terms.

By 1959 the danger had become quite acute. Yet its nature had been recognised quite early on in the Fifties. The late E. F. M. Durbin in The Politics of Democratic Socialism maintained that the proletariat (the working class in Marxist phrasology) was assuming "bourgeois characteristics." He continued:

In all sorts of ways--through the slow growth of education, through the acquisition of higher professional qualifications by large groups of the proletariat, and above all, through the acquisition of large stocks of property--the proletariat of the Marxist textbook is rapidly disappearing. . . It amounts to the conversion of the people who now occupy the technical position of the proletariat--into persons not fundamentally different from the Marxist category of the petit bourgeoisie.<sup>33</sup>

Considerable evidence has since been garnered which supports Durbin's propositions. For instance, it is not now seriously questioned that the average working class home is becoming middle class in its acquisitions or that the existence of the average worker and his family is increasingly middle class in its values and aspirations. These developments are most graphically illustrated in the changed pattern of consumer spending.

a) Because a higher proportion of income was spent on one group does not necessarily mean an increase of quantity to the same degree--it could be due to exceptional price fluctuations.

b) It should also be remembered, however, that these figures are for the whole population and not just the working class. However there are strong indications that the national statistics are equally appropriate to the working class.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-9.





Changes in Family Spending Habits<sup>34</sup>

	1953 Average weekly expenditure per household		1959 Average weekly expenditure per household		% increase of total expenditure
	Cash	% of total	Cash	% of total	
Transport and Cars	16/5	6.9	26/2	8.4	+1.5
Fuel, lights and power	12/3	5.1	18/10	6.0	+0.9
Housing	20/9	8.7	28/11	9.2	+0.5
Durable household goods	16/7	7.0	23/1	7.4	+0.4
Other goods	16/11	7.1	22/4	7.1	--
Alcoholic drinks	8/2	3.4	10/2	3.3	-0.1
Services	20/8	8.7	27/0	8.6	-0.1
Miscel- laneous	1/6	0.6	1/4	0.4	-0.2
Food	81/9	34.2	103/7	33.0	-1.2
Clothing and Footwear	27/2	11.4	31/11	10.2	-1.2

Noticeably, the largest increases of family spending were in the fields of durable goods, in cars (1.5% increase), housing (0.5% increase) and household goods (0.4% increase). As a result of the large and general increase in consumer spending there was the probability that whereas the man at the factory bench might still be plainly working class, in his new home, in his car, or out shopping, his social position would be more difficult to assess. Such a man, Butler reasoned, "may well think of

<sup>34</sup>"Changes in Family Spending Habits, " The Times (London), October 23, 1961.



himself as a consumer first and only secondly as a worker."<sup>35</sup>

Ferdynand Zweig, who undertook a sociological survey of the "new factory worker" discovered that the new affluence had indeed percolated down to the working class.<sup>36</sup>

Town	Sample of households	T. V. 's	Radiograms and Record Players	Washing Machines	'Fridges
Luton	107	91	44	33	30
Mitcham	96	84	51	23	26

In Zweig's opinion, those factors which had previously characterized the working class existence - insecurity, a hand-to-mouth existence and the fear of unemployment - were no longer discernible features in the make-up of the modern British worker. On the contrary, there had been what Zweig described as a revolution of rising expectations, as a result of which the workers were looking forward to increased acquisitions and new material comforts.

### The Younger Generation

This attitude was pretty general amongst all groups, but it was particularly prevalent amongst the younger generation. A letter from a member of the Labour League of Youth written in 1955 admirably summed up the position.

Young people today...believe, rightly or wrongly, that the economic and social evils of the pre-1939 era will never return... My generation does not know economic fear but is living well and looking to the future, which is where it appears the Tories are looking. Indeed, my ordinary working class friends, engineers, clerks

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<sup>35</sup>Butler & Rose, The British General Election of 1959, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup>Ferdynand Zweig, "The New Factory Worker," Twentieth Century, Vol. 167, No. 999, May, 1961.



and the like expect (his italics) that when they are older and married they will be able to afford such a consistently high standard of living as to be able to own a house and a car. No pipe dreams these, but the real beliefs of young men looking to a bright future.<sup>37</sup>

Significantly, in view of the points made in the letter, the Socialist Commentary Survey discovered that the group with which Labour was most out of touch was that containing the "potential young voters" (i.e. those already 18 who would be able to vote in the next election). In a group which throughout the years has justly been considered to be radical in politics, it appeared that 52% were Conservatives, 43% were Labour supporters, and 5% were Liberals. Abrams noted that over the past fifteen years there had been a noticeable shift to the right amongst the young people so that they were now more right than their elders. Furthermore, Abrams pointed out this move to the right was most complete amongst the middle class group. Asked to describe the Labour Party, young people saw it "as outstandingly the Party of poor people, factory workers, old age pensioners, and people interested in helping the underdog."<sup>38</sup> Peggy Crane noted this attitude and pointed to the voting figures for the 1955 and 1959 elections.

Labour Supporters		
	<u>% of under 30's</u>	<u>% of over 65's</u>
1955	42	33
1959	36	40

She concluded that the party was in danger of being thought of as the

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<sup>37</sup>Quoted in Butler, The British General Election of 1955, pp. 163-4.

<sup>38</sup>Abrams & Rose, pp. 47-58.





"party of the pensioners." <sup>39</sup> Whereas this might denote a very Christian and charitable attitude, it was not a particularly healthy portent for a supposedly vigorous party.

### "The Home Centred Society"

Probably the most potent effect of the post-war prosperity and changed spending habits was the increased importance of the family as the social unit of society - a development which seemed, and still seems capable of re-orientating working class loyalties towards the family and the home. Writing in 1959, Abrams suggested:

For the first time in modern British history the working class home, as well as the middle class home has become a place that is warm and comfortable and able to provide its own fireside entertainment - in fact, pleasant to live in. The outcome is a working class way of life which is decreasingly concerned with activities outside the home or with values wider than those of his family. <sup>40</sup>

As a result of increased family consciousness, Abrams believed it was possible to discern a decline in the "outside" activities of the working class; a development which apparently had not been hindered by the rise in the numbers of car owners amongst the working class. <sup>41</sup> Contacts

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<sup>39</sup>Peggy Crane, "Labour, its own worst enemy," The Political Quarterly, July - September 1960, p. 375.

<sup>40</sup>Mark Abrams, "The Home Centred Society," The Listener, Vol. LXII, No. 1600, November 26, 1959.

<sup>41</sup>It might have been supposed that the acquisition of cars by the working class family would have resulted in the increased break-up of the family unit. On the contrary, however; the family remained a unit but became mobile. As Mr. Gaitskell commented in a newspaper interview: "When, for instance, a working class family buys a motor car, I believe it may produce a feeling of a more individual and independent status. Its loyalty ceases to be the simple group loyalty. It begins to function as an independent unit." Daily Mail (London) July 30, 1959.





with fellow workers had also been reduced. The average working man was no longer obliged to "escape" from his miserable home each night. He no longer frequented working mens' clubs, the local pub or trade union meetings as had been his wont. In Abrams' judgement, the modern worker of the late Fifties preferred to stay at home to watch television and to enjoy his family's company.

Although the working man's contact with his immediate working class environment had been severely restricted as a result of closer ties with home, his intellectual horizon of knowledge and perceptiveness had paradoxically been widened, as a result, presumably, of his being brought into contact with the outside world through the medium of television. This dual development had two consequences. Because of his more individualistic position as the head of a family rather than as a member of the working class, the modern worker identified himself far less readily with working class ideals and aspirations. Consequently, he became more objective in his attitude towards the working class, and less likely to be successfully appealed to by typical "working class terminology." Gaitskell had recognised the new attitude during the 1955 campaign. "Almost anyone," he wrote,

who took part in the Election agrees on one thing--the greater detachment of the audiences at meetings and of people generally. Since 1959...I have never known so few people seem to feel themselves really involved. It was not only that the meetings were smaller, but that at most meetings there was much less sense of participation. It was not that the audiences were bored or indifferent. They listened carefully and were appreciative--but they seemed more like friendly supporters on the side-lines than people taking part in the fight themselves.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Hugh Gaitskell, "The Campaign Considered," Socialist Commentary, July 1955, p. 12.



While it cannot be denied that prosperity has made the working class more affluent so that it is now quite common to find washing machines, television sets, refrigerators and even cars in working class homes, it is much more difficult to prove that these new acquisitions have automatically seduced the working class from its earlier loyalties, and converted its members into urban peasants determined to resist any party likely to threaten acquisitiveness, and particularly its own acquisitiveness. Admittedly the 1959 General Election was noted for its materialistic tendencies. Butler considered "there were good grounds for assuming that the voters were primarily interested in material issues. Public opinion polls showed that to most of the electorate concern for their economic well-being came first." Furthermore, "the way in which the public's interest concentrated upon its own economic well-being was frequently criticised in the serious press."<sup>43</sup> However, it still remains a debatable point that the increased acquisitive materialistic attitude of the electorate was responsible for Labour's defeat.

#### The Myth of the Monolithic Working Class

It might be demonstrated that the working class is less monolithic, that the family has become the predominant social unit and that this has produced new loyalties narrower than the old class loyalties. But the working class has never been really monolithic--nor has it ever been solidly Labour. In 1951, when Labour won the largest number of votes in British political history the Conservatives still managed to

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<sup>43</sup>Butler & Rose, p. 71.



salvage 6.2 million or 28% of the manual workers' vote.<sup>44</sup> It has been shown that despite the fact that Britain is the most industrialised and urbanised country in the world, it does not have the strong socialist party one might justifiably expect, considering the high proportion of proletarians in the population. Lipset points out, that of all European socialist movements "the socialist movement in Britain has the advantage that the working class... is the majority class."<sup>45</sup> Yet despite this, the British Labour Party is one of the weakest, simply because it has never been able to win control of the overwhelming majority of the working class vote. Lipset ascribes this state of affairs to three things; the "deference" working class voter, the "aspiring" worker and the effect of increased educational facilities for the working class.

The "deference" voter is typically British.<sup>46</sup> He is the traditional "humble servant who knows his position and accepts without question the right of the upper classes, "his betters," to rule the country as they see fit. It seems probable that such a person is a constant factor in British society and thus need not interest us. The more important category is that of the "aspiring" worker. He is the particular offspring of the newly emerging affluent society. He is status conscious,<sup>47</sup> desirous of

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<sup>44</sup>Bonham, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup>Seymour M. Lipset, "Must Tories Always Triumph?", Socialist Commentary, November 1960, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup>See Ralph Samuel, "The Deference Voter," New Left Review, No. 1, January-February 1960, pp. 9-13.

<sup>47</sup>An expression of the growing importance of the "aspiring" worker may perhaps be deduced from the growing numbers who now supplement their use of the National Health Service with private health care. In 1957, only 100,000 used private care as well as "National Health." By





improving the position of himself and his children. As part of a group he seeks political control by that class to which he hopes to eventually belong. Thus, politically, he rejects his working class origins.<sup>48</sup>

The third factor instrumental in the disintegration of the monolithic nature of the working class vote has been education.<sup>49</sup> Lipset sees this as directly responsible for the shift in public concern from domestic to foreign issues during elections. He says:

A variety of survey data from Britain and other countries indicate that concern for international issues increases sharply with education and social status... Increased concern with foreign affairs results in the electorate's heightened identification with the nation and with national solidarity, sentiments that are associated with traditionalism and conservatism.<sup>50</sup>

In view of Lipset's comments it is noteworthy that a Gallup Poll taken during the 1959 Election campaign recorded that twice as many voters (43%) thought the Tories could best handle a summit meeting as felt that Labour could (21%). Moreover, only 51% of Labour supporters believed their party could deal best with a summit conference.

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1962 it was estimated that this number had grown to 1,200,000. It was suggested that the practice of indulging in private health care was used as a "status symbol." "Health Care in Britain," Time, Vol. LXXIX, No. 4, January 26, 1962.

<sup>48</sup>The Socialist Commentary Survey reported that about 40% of the manual workers interviewed reported themselves as members of the middle class and that of this group, close to two thirds voted Conservative. Abrams & Rose, pp. 15-18.

<sup>49</sup>The influence of the H-Bomb and the dire prospects of a nuclear war cannot be discounted as another possible cause of the re-orientation of public interest.

<sup>50</sup>Lipset, Socialist Commentary, November 1960, pp. 12-13.



It is possible that the fall of the Labour vote in the Fifties was not directly attributable to the changing status of the working class. Taking 1951 as the zenith of Labour's fortunes, it is evident that even then the party's success in capturing the middle class vote was limited. Of the 10.5 million adults in the middle class, Labour managed to win only 1.9 million votes.<sup>51</sup> Breaking this segment into three categories, the picture becomes clearer.

Distribution of Labour's Middle Class Vote 1951<sup>52</sup>

	<u>Votes</u>
39% of Group A: shop assistants, postmen, police, and telegraphists	700,000
29% of Group B: clerks, typists, insurance agents, and commercial travellers	770,000
24% of Group C: lower professions, teachers, journalists, nurses, industrial scientists, and actors	360,000

In the opinion of Merlyn Rees, the success of the Conservatives during the Fifties was less a result of a disintegrating working class than their ability to win over increased proportions of these groups.<sup>53</sup>

The difficulty in accepting the explanation of "working class prosperity" for Labour's decline, lies in the fact that it fails to consider that "at least half the working class acquired durable consumer goods on at least as lavish a scale as their neighbours - but continued to vote Labour." Abrams' findings indicated that working class "political loyalties were based on considerations other than ownership and non-ownership

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<sup>51</sup>Bonham, p. 173.

<sup>52</sup>Merlyn Rees, "The Social Setting" The Political Quarterly, Vol. 31, pp. 285-99.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.



of durable consumer goods. "<sup>54</sup>

Proportion in working class groups owning particular durable consumer goods<sup>55</sup>

	Conservative	Labour	Others	All Working Class
	%	%	%	%
Washing Machines	36	36	33	35
Refrigerators	16	13	23	15
Telephones	14	7	14	11
T. V.	76	81	77	79
Car	17	16	21	17
House	30	20	39	27

Abrams concluded:

The evidence of this section of the enquiry is that personal property and security are not by themselves the determinants of working class politics; within the working class both Labour and Conservative supporters seem to have enjoyed the prosperity of the past decade. <sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, it is highly significant that there was a considerable proportion of the working class voting either Conservative or Liberal. It might well be that Conservative working class voters were only a little more affluent than Labour working class supporters. But surely the fact that Conservatives were more affluent in every aspect of consumer goods except television sets and washing machines (equal) cannot be discounted.

Finally, to whatever degree the new prosperity and affluence were responsible for the changed voting habits of the working class, it is undoubtedly the case that many in the Labour Party correlated the two. As a result a very curious attitude towards prosperity was adopted by some

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<sup>54</sup>Abrams & Rose, p. 42.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 45.





dedicated socialists. One observer pointed out that some

Labour Party members have been peculiarly reluctant to recognise and welcome prosperity. A hankering after the bad conditions of the good old days still persists among many people, in the naive belief that bad times will bring the voters flocking back to Labour.<sup>57</sup>

The danger for the Labour Party was that this attitude might give the public the impression that Labour disapproved of the new affluence. But this would only serve to substantiate the public's association of the Labour Party with post-war austerity and rationing. Conversely the efforts by the Conservatives to capture prosperity as a symbol and to foster the spread of the middle class attitudes of affluence and material comfort throughout society, were considerably facilitated by Labour's "sour grapes" attitude. Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker admitted in Forward:

In part it (the '59 defeat) was due to our own alienation of the new working class - workers in the true sense, but with a new social attitude because of the possession of cars, washing machines and the like. The simple fact is that the Tories identified themselves with this new working class rather better than we did.<sup>58</sup>

By the end of the Fifties, the lesson for Labour seemed clear. Its popular appeal and electoral image would have to change. Ferdynand Zweig, studying the developments affecting the working class in the Fifties pointed out: "The tendencies are still in progress : they mark the

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<sup>57</sup>See Crane, The Political Quarterly, pp. 374-84.

<sup>58</sup>Quoted in The Round Table, Vol. L, pp. 68.





direction rather than the completion."<sup>59</sup> The question was, would Labour be able to restore its public image before these tendencies had reached completion?

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<sup>59</sup>Ferdynand Zweig, Twentieth Century, May, 1961.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Clearly a problem of considerable complexity faces the Labour Party. It is evident that no single factor can adequately account for the Party's decline in the Fifties. It is also evident that Labour's dilemma arises not from searching for the cause but in determining, from a multiplicity of causes, which are of greater or lesser significance. Only when this task has been successfully concluded will the Party once more be in the position to regain the radical initiative fleetingly held in 1945.

Whether it was justified or not, the Labour Party's public image suffered seriously during the Fifties. Defeat in 1959 finally convinced Labour that a party unable to control itself could hardly claim the right to rule the country. Obviously, the British public as a whole had not the slightest inclination of placing itself under the care of a party perpetually on the brink of "civil war." Nationalisation was similarly instrumental in causing Labour to forfeit its popularity. Whenever the price of coal was raised, or electricity rates went up, or the morning train was late, public grievances were automatically directed towards the nationalised industry at fault; and the party responsible for nationalisation suffered accordingly. The Fifties were also remarkable for the outbreak of strikes, both "wildcat" and official. Public hostility built up against the trade unions, and the Labour Party which shared the



financial resources of the unions, shared also in their fall from public grace and favour.

Some authorities, Jennings in particular, are of the opinion that these factors, together with what they call "casual causes" are sufficient to explain the reversal of the "swing of the pendulum" in 1959. Those who are of this persuasion point to the fact that Labour's popularity, according to the public opinion polls, frequently rose above that of the Conservatives during the 1955-59 period. Immediately after the failure of the Suez Intervention the Labour Party was over four points ahead. Furthermore, increased unemployment in late 1958 and early 1959 led to additional drops in the popularity of the Conservatives. Yet Labour still lost the Election! One is bound to question why?

Jennings would persuade us the Conservative victory was the direct result of three factors: the extensive publicity campaign undertaken by the Conservative Party and private industry antagonistic to the Labour programme; adroit political management which succeeded in creating the image of MacMillan as an elder statesman (his visit to Moscow and the subsequent meeting with Eisenhower in London were of inestimable value in this respect); and finally an election Budget notable only for its reductions in taxation. "These and other casual factors, including a series of unofficial strikes" declared Jennings, "are enough to explain the failure of the pendulum to swing."<sup>1</sup>

Jennings is sufficiently ambiguous in defining his "casual factors"

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Ivor Jennings, Party Politics : The Growth of Parties (Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 371.





that it is difficult to disprove him categorically. Certainly he neglects to mention the social and material changes which took place in Britain during the Fifties. Possibly he considers such deep-seated changes as casual. If so, Jennings must put a curious connotation on the word. "Casual" would appear to infer something relatively unimportant and insignificant, or at the very least, something which is of a temporary nature. Yet the social and material changes affecting Britain in the Fifties were none of these things. On the contrary, the course of this study indicates that changes in the social and material environment provide a most fundamental and comprehensive explanation for Labour's decline.

In the theoretical framework, it was suggested that the social and material environment formed the base of the Pyramid of Causation, and that this affected, in varying degrees, individual values and the standards of society. It appears fairly certain that the increased affluence of British society resulted in a more materialistic state of mind. This thesis concludes that the Tories were more successful in identifying themselves with and taking advantage of these changed social conditions. Labour politicians themselves noted this fact and revisionists among their number went even further admitting that the egalitarian demands of the Forties had lost their appeal for a working class, condemned by many for carrying its political morality in empty pockets. By the close of the Fifties the Conservative cry of "opportunity" had proved to be the more potent.

Accepting the social and material changes as the initial cause of Labour's decline, other factors assume a new significance. Disunity, which developed apace during the Fifties, arose from and was aggravated by differing interpretations of various election defeats. Each defeat served to intensify Labour's problems and widen its divisions. Much of the



criticism of the Party's association with the trade unions came from within the Labour Party itself from persons frantically searching for a scape-goat to which all the blame for Labour's decline could be attributed. Nationalisation was another case cited by those attempting to find a simple solution for Labour's difficulties. Much evidence can be brought to bear indicating that the policy had become an electoral liability. It was supposed that once the "nationalisation bogey" was dropped (as it was officially in 1961) Labour would re-emerge, chastened but victorious. However, this has not proved to be the case. The New Statesman commenting on the Orpington by-election result admitted:

No single person or group is exclusively to blame. After the 1959 defeat, those, like Mr. Gaitskell, who wanted to change Labour's image to attract the middle class, could plausibly argue that they were frustrated by the "diehards" of Clause 4... But that is now in the past. Mr. Gaitskell won, and it is for his kind of party and for his policies that Labour now fights--to no better effect.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, despite the Party's extensive renovations of what were supposed to be the key factors in Labour's decline, The Labour Party, on the basis of recent by-elections, is still unable to regain public favour. It would seem that party dissention, the trade unions association, the "Bogey" of nationalisation were all symptoms rather than causes of the decline. While, however, they were not the cause of the decline, this in no way infers that they were not instrumental in steepening the rate of the decline. Quite obviously they were very significant in helping to detract from Labour's popularity. Thus Labour finds itself in a vicious

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<sup>2</sup>"Inquest After Orpington," New Statesman, Vol. LXIII, No. 1618, March, 1962.



circle; the greater its loss of popularity, the greater the tension and disputation within the party, and the greater the public's disenchantment with the Party.

It was earlier submitted that Labour's problems are very complex. Surveys made during the Fifties indicated the Party should adopt a more middle class image in response to the social changes, that it should cease to be so completely a socialist party, based on the working class. While it is probable that this is the correct, indeed the only alternative, it is quite possible that repercussions of a harmful nature to Labour might result. Much of the day to day functioning of the Party depends upon the unstinting work and enthusiasm of local constituency members. Frequently, they are the left-wing "militants" whose "instinctive loyalty for the movement" is based on the belief that it is "not just a machine for winning votes, but the instrument of a moral crusade."<sup>3</sup> The Party, it seems, cannot really afford to lose these people. Their enthusiastic participation both in discussion and work has been invaluable in the past<sup>4</sup> and it is difficult to see how the Party could survive without them in the future.

Therefore, the quandary in which Labour finds itself is, either to deny its background and run the risk of not only losing its traditionally loyal workers but also of becoming indistinguishable from the Tory Party;<sup>5</sup> or to continue on what is a certain disaster course. Whatever

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See John Cole, "The Labour Party Machine," Manchester Guardian Weekly, October 12, 1961.

<sup>5</sup>This is a very real danger as a Liverpool constituency survey





decision the Labour Party finally takes, it will be a painful one.

As Labour and its attendant problems entered the decade of the sixties, a new element was introduced into the political situation. The Liberal Party which for long had been dead without realising it, was re-incarnated. In spite of the fact that they ran twice as many candidates in 1959 as compared to the 1955 Election, their average vote rose from 6,567 to 7,561.<sup>6</sup> Since the general election the Liberals have done even better polling, on the average, 27% of the votes cast. Frequently they have run second, and at Orpington they actually won the seat with 52% of the vote, forcing the Labour candidate to lose his deposit. It is understandable that many considered the Liberals presented a potential threat of emerging as a significant political force - something more than the expression of a political joke which the electorate could play from time to time to "shake up" the big parties.

During the Fifties, the Liberal intervention was more harmful to Labour than to the Conservatives. In the 1955 Election it was estimated that the Liberal candidates won on the average 12.5% of the vote, taking 5% from the Conservatives and 7.5% from Labour.<sup>7</sup> A similar situation existed in 1959, although the Liberal ability to steal Labour votes was by

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indicated. In its conclusions it was remarked that "many of the high percentage failed to vote because they could see no difference between Labour and Tory policies." "The Garston Survey, " Liverpool Fabian Society, May, 1958 (mimeographed).

<sup>6</sup>"The Resurgence of the Liberals, " Round Table, Vol. I, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup>"Why the Conservatives Won, " The Economist, Vol. CLXXV, No. 5832, June 4, 1955.





no means as marked as in 1955.<sup>8</sup> However, the threat that the Liberals might take over the role of the progressive party of the radical left was sufficient to inject greater urgency, at times even desperation, into Labour's efforts to seek a way out of the slough of political despond.

To those of the Left, the prospect of such a development was far from appealing. As The Observer's editorial pointed out

... even if the Liberals could one day replace the Labour Party as the chief party of the left, this could be done only after many years and decades of political warfare which would divide the left and keep the Conservatives permanently in office. This is not a prospect that can give pleasure to either party of the Left.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly The Observer continued: "A more attractive outcome would be some form of political alliance between the two parties which would give the country a true progressive party..."<sup>10</sup>

This thought had crossed the minds of many politicians after the 1959 disappointment and some soon noted that "on the whole range of foreign, colonial and libertarian issues the best and most dominant Liberals... (saw) completely eye to eye with the Labour Party." In Jenkins' opinion "the overwhelming need (was) to canalise the anti-Tory vote into the most effective channels."<sup>11</sup> Apparently the Liberals were not unduly

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<sup>8</sup>There seems to be some dispute on this point. Whereas the October 11, 1959 edition of The Observer noted that "the Left could gain no comfort from the considerable increase in the Liberal vote (5.2%) for it had been made more at the expense of Labour than the Conservatives," D. E. Butler estimated that the Liberal intervention had taken more votes from Conservatives than Labour at the ratio of 55 to 45. British General Election of 1959, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup>The Observer (London), October 11, 1959.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted from "No Shot-Gun Marriage?", Manchester Guardian Weekly, October 15, 1959.



distressed at the prospect. Their leader, Mr. Grimond, speaking soon after the Election envisioned: "Eventually, there may be a change in our politics which could take the form of a new party run on radical lines and composed of former followers of both the Labour and Conservative Parties."<sup>12</sup> Although the proposal was bandied about in speeches in 1960 and 1961, it was not crystallised or brought into the open until Woodrow Wyatt presented his plan for a "Lib-Lab" pact in November 1961.<sup>13</sup> But already the political situation had changed; what would have been considered seriously after the 1959 Election was rejected out of hand by the National Executive in 1962. Mr. Wyatt was condemned for his action and under pressure both from Transport House and his local constituency party, was obliged to retract his suggestion.<sup>14</sup>

There are several explanations of this changed attitude of the Labour Leaders. The shock of defeat in 1959 had led many to over-estimate the strength of the Liberal revival.<sup>15</sup> Many had forgotten that under

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<sup>12</sup>"The Resurgence of the Liberals," Round Table, Vol. L, 1959, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup>See Woodrow Wyatt, "My Plan For a Lib-Lab Pact," New Statesman, Vol. LXIII, No. 1611, January 26, 1962.

<sup>14</sup>See "Wyatt drops his Lib-Lab Campaign," The Observer (London), April 15, 1962.

<sup>15</sup>The danger of over-estimating the Liberal revival was pointed out by Jorgan Rasmussen, "Implications of the Potential Strength of the Liberal Party for the Future of British Politics," Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. XIV, No. 3, 1961, pp. 378-90. He made three points. First, he noted that more voters were willing to vote Liberal in by-elections than in the general election, secondly, the Liberals had shown an inability to win industrial seats--(Bolton, he considered a severe setback for the Liberals). Thirdly, he pointed out the inadequate funds available to the party which would restrict its progress regardless of enthusiasm. Francis Boyd, also points out in "Building a Liberal Party Machine" The Guardian (Manchester) September 20, 1961, that the growing tendency of central





a system without proportional representation there was a limit beyond which a party that relied largely on ogling for protest votes probably could not expect to go.<sup>16</sup> Butler in considering the 1959 Election results recognised: "The forces that make for the continuance of the existing battle between Conservative and Labour are very strong."<sup>17</sup> But the most significant development for the Labour Party was the fact that in by-elections Liberals were taking far more votes away from the Conservatives than from Labour. The Tory government had fallen sadly out of favour and the public's protest votes instead of gravitating to the leading opposition party were attaching themselves to the Liberals. At the Lincoln by-election the Liberal candidate reduced Labour's share of the poll by 4.6% while the Tory vote fell by 14.7%. Small wonder that George Brown, Labour's Deputy Leader could claim: "We can win the next General Election."<sup>18</sup> : for if this trend continued it is quite conceivable that the Liberals will effectively split the anti-socialist vote. While

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control in the party necessitated by its growth is "irksome to those Liberals who value the party most for the freedom it allows to individuals."

<sup>16</sup>The Liberals are still limited by the electoral system which discriminates seriously against the rise of a third - and/or middle - party; see Jennings, Party Politics : Appeal to the People , pp. 261-4. Lipset concluded that a third party could get nowhere without a regional base; "Any hope for the Liberals?" Socialist Commentary, March 1961. This the Liberals lacked most definitely. Jennings, assuming that constituencies with Liberal votes of 10,000 plus, determined three strong Liberal areas; a) Wales and the Western counties; (non-conformist areas); b) seaside resorts (high proportion of retired middle class); and c) small county towns and intermediary suburbs (small businessmen and shopkeepers). Despite this however, Liberal strength was so dissipated that even in these areas they were "not strong enough to win more than a handful of seats." Jennings, p. 286.

<sup>17</sup>Butler & Rose The British General Election of 1959, p. 201.

<sup>18</sup>"Brown : 1963 Election, " The Observer (London), March 11, 1962.





it is hardly likely that the Liberals will increase their parliamentary representation by any appreciable amount, their active participation in what they intend to be 300 constituencies, with the ensuing three-cornered protests, can only result in a Labour victory at the next general election. This view is also held by the political correspondent of

The Observer:

The most likely consequence of the Liberals' current run of success will be an anti-socialist majority in the country and a Labour Government all the same. This is not the first Liberal revival, or the biggest, or the last, but it is richer than most in irony. If it continues Labour will be in next time, Mr. Gaitskell will escape political oblivion--and the country will have a government that it won't really want.<sup>19</sup>

Should Labour return to power in this curious and hardly creditable manner, it might have the result of solving Labour's problems, which seem insoluble so long as the party remains in opposition. Labour in power is a vastly different organisation from Labour in opposition.<sup>20</sup> The delicate balance of conflicting forces is unequivocally tilted in the favour of the parliamentary leadership. The Party Leader, as Prime Minister, enjoys prestige and power within the Party which would otherwise be unavailable to him. Furthermore, the type of men prominent in government are not the hot-headed demagogues who delight in the irresponsibilities of opposition, but solid administrators. It could thus be hoped, that the Labour Party in office would develop sober statemen for its leaders. Should this become part of Labour's image, one can expect

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<sup>19</sup>Mark Arnold-Foster, "Waiting for the Take-Off," The Observer (London), April 8, 1962.

<sup>20</sup>See R. T. McKenzie, British Political Parties, Ch. VII.



the Party to appeal to the self-conscious middle classes of the country in a way that Labour found impossible during the Fifties. However, most important for Labour's image, the Labour Party in power will be given the opportunity to govern in the "affluent society" and to destroy the impression in the public's mind that Labour is the party of post-war austerity, rationing and government controls. Then, perhaps, Labour will be able to repudiate its past as effectively as has the Tory Party repudiated the part it played in the Thirties. If Labour can successfully do this, it soon will be in the position to continue the political struggle with renewed vigour.



## APPENDIX A

### THE CONSTITUTION AND STANDING ORDERS OF THE LABOUR PARTY

#### Clause I. - NAME

The Labour Party

#### Clause II. - MEMBERSHIP

(1) There shall be two classes of members, namely:

(a) Affiliated Members.

(b) Individual Members.

(2) Affiliated Members shall consist of:

(a) Trade Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress or recognised by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress as bona fide Trade Unions.

(b) Co-operative Societies.

(c) Socialist Societies.

(d) Professional Organisations which, in the opinion of the National Executive Committee, have interests consistent with those of other affiliated organisations.

(e) Constituency Labour Parties and Central Labour Parties in Divided Boroughs.

(f) County or Area Federations of Constituency Labour Parties,



APPENDIX A - Continued

hereinafter referred to as Federations.

Clause IV. - PARTY OBJECTS

NATIONAL

(1) To organise and maintain in Parliament and in the country a Political Labour Party.

(2) To co-operate with the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, or other Kindred Organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the Party Constitution and Standing Orders.

(3) To give effect as far as may be practicable to the principles from time to time approved by the Party Conference.

(4) To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

(5) Generally to promote the Political, Social and Economic Emancipation of the People, and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life.

Clause V. - PARTY PROGRAMME

(1) The Party Conference shall decide from time to time what specific proposals of legislative, financial or administrative reform shall be included in the Party Programme.





APPENDIX A - Continued

No proposal shall be included in the Party Programme unless it has been adopted by the Party Conference by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the votes recorded on a card vote.

(2) The National Executive Committee and the Parliamentary Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party shall decide which items from the Party Programme shall be included in the Manifesto which shall be issued by the National Executive Committee prior to every General Election. The Joint Meeting of the two Committees shall also define the attitude of the Party to the principal issues raised by the Election which are not covered by the Manifesto.

Clause VI. - THE PARTY CONFERENCE

(1) The work of the Party shall be under the direction and control of the Party Conference, which shall itself be subject to the Constitution and Standing Orders of the Party. The Party Conference shall meet regularly once in every year and also at such other times as it may be convened by the National Executive Committee.

(2) The Party Conference shall be constituted as follows:

(a) Delegates duly appointed by each affiliated Trade Union or other organisations to the number of one delegate for each 5,000 members or part thereof on whom affiliation fees and by-election insurance premiums were paid for the year ending December 31 preceding the Conference.

(b) Delegates duly appointed by Constituency Labour Parties (or Trades Councils acting as such) to the number of one delegate for each 5,000 individual members or part thereof on whom affiliation fees



APPENDIX A - Continued

and by-election insurance premiums were paid for the year ending December 31 preceding the Conference; where the individual and affiliated women's membership exceeds 2,500 an additional woman delegate may be appointed.

(c) Delegates duly appointed by Central Labour Parties or Trades Councils acting as such in Divided Boroughs not exceeding one for each Central Labour Party provided the affiliation fees and by-election insurance premiums have been paid for the year ending December 31 preceding the Conference.

(d) Delegates duly appointed by Federations not exceeding one for each Federation provided the affiliation fees have been paid for the year ending December 31 preceding the Conference.

(e) Ex-officio Members of the Party Conference as follows:

(i) Members of the National Executive Committee.

(ii) Members of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

(iii) Parliamentary Labour Candidates whose candidatures have been duly endorsed by the National Executive Committee.

(iv) The Secretary of the Party.

Ex-officio Members shall have no voting power.

(f) Any special Party Conference shall be called on the same basis of representation as that upon which the last Annual Party Conference was convened.

(3) In the event of a duly appointed delegate being elected as



APPENDIX A - Continued

Treasurer or as a member of the National Executive Committee, the Affiliated Organisation responsible for his or her appointment as a delegate may claim authority at subsequent Party Conferences during his or her period of Office, to appoint a delegate additional to the number applicable to it under paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of Section 2 of this Clause, provided the delegate elected as Treasurer or as a member of the National Executive Committee:

- (i) Remains qualified to be appointed as a delegate under Clause VII; and
- (ii) Continues to be duly appointed as a delegate by the Affiliated Organisation claiming authority to appoint an additional delegate within the provisions of this Section.

Clause VIII. - THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(1) There shall be a National Executive Committee of the Party consisting of 25 members and a Treasurer, elected by the Party Conference at its regular Annual Meeting in such proportion and under such conditions as may be set out in the Standing Orders for the time being in force. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party shall be ex-officio members of the National Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall, subject to the control and directions of the Party Conference, be the Administrative Authority of the Party.

(2) The duties and powers of the National Executive Committee shall include the following:





APPENDIX A - Continued

(a) To ensure the establishment of, and to keep in active operation, a Constituency Labour Party in every Constituency, a Central Labour Party in every Divided Borough, and a Federation in every suitable area, in accordance with the Rules laid down by the Party Conference for the purpose.

(b) To enforce the Constitution, Standing Orders, and Rules of the Party and to take any action it deems necessary for such purpose, whether by way of disaffiliation of an organisation or expulsion of an individual, or otherwise. Any such action shall be reported to the next Annual Conference of the Party.

(c) To confer with the Parliamentary Labour Party at the opening of each Parliamentary Session, and at any other time when it or the Parliamentary Party may desire a conference on any matters relating to the work and progress of the Party.

(d) To see that all its Officers and members conform to the Constitution, Rules and Standing Orders of the Party.

(e) To present to the Annual Party Conference a Report covering the work and progress of the Party during its period of office, together with a Financial Statement and Accounts duly audited. The report, Financial Statement and Accounts shall be sent to affiliated organizations at least two clear weeks before the opening of the Annual Party Conference.

(f) To propose to the Annual Party Conference such amendments to the Constitution, Rules and Standing Orders as may be deemed



APPENDIX A - Continued

desirable and to submit to the Annual Party Conference or to any Special Party Conference, called in accordance with the Standing Orders, such resolutions and declarations affecting the Programme, Principles and Policy of the Party as in its view may be necessitated by political circumstances.

STANDING ORDERS

Standing Order 1.

ANNUAL PARTY CONFERENCE

(1) The National Executive Committee shall convene the Annual Party Conference during October in each year, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Constitution and these Standing Orders. It may also convene Special Sessions of the Party Conference when it deems necessary.

Standing Order 3.

VOTING

Voting at the Annual Party Conference shall be by cards on the following basis:

(a) National and Constituency Organisations: One voting card for each 1,000 members or part thereof on whom affiliation fees were paid for the year ending December 31 preceding the Conference.

(b) Federations and Central Labour Parties: One voting card each.



APPENDIX A - Continued

Voting at any Special Party Conference shall be on the same bases as those upon which voting took place at the preceding Annual Party Conference.

Standing Order 4.

ELECTION OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(1) For the purpose of nomination and election the National Executive Committee shall be divided into four Divisions:

Division I shall consist of twelve members, to be nominated by Trade Unions from among their duly appointed delegates, and elected by their delegations at the Annual Party Conference.

Division II shall consist of one member, to be nominated by Socialist, Co-operative, and Professional Organisations from among their duly appointed delegates, and elected by their delegations at the Annual Party Conference.

Division III shall consist of seven members, to be nominated by Federations Constituency Labour Parties and Central Labour Parties, from among their duly appointed delegates, and elected by their delegations at the Annual Party Conference. A Constituency Labour Party may nominate its Member of Parliament, or duly endorsed Candidate attending the Conference as an ex-officio member.

Division IV shall consist of five women members, to be nominated by any affiliated organisation, and elected by the Annual Party Conference as a whole. A Constituency Labour Party may nominate its woman Member of Parliament or duly endorsed woman Candidate attending as an ex-officio member of Conference.



APPENDIX A - Continued

Standing Order 5.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

(1) The National Executive Committee shall elect its own Chairman and Vice-Chairman at its first meeting each year.

(2) The Treasurer shall be nominated and elected separately by the Annual Party Conference. Every affiliated organisation may nominate a person for Treasurer who is a duly-appointed Delegate to the Annual Party Conference, or a Member of Parliament or a duly-endorsed Candidate, attending Conference as an ex-officio member.

(3) The Secretary shall be elected by the Annual Party Conference, on the recommendation of the National Executive Committee, and be ex officio a member of the Conference. He shall devote his whole time to the work of the Party and shall not be eligible as a Candidate for or a Member of Parliament. He shall remain in office so long as his work gives satisfaction to the National Executive Committee and Party Conference. Should a vacancy in the office occur between two Annual Party Conferences the National Executive Committee shall have full power to fill the vacancy, subject to the approval of the Annual Party Conference next following.





## APPENDIX B

### I. THE NATIONAL RESULT

Electorate	Votes cast	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Communist	Other		
1945*	32,836,419	24,082,612	100%	39.8%	48.3%	9.1%	0.4%	2.4%
				9,577,667	11,632,891	2,197,191	102,760	572,103
1950	34,269,770	28,772,671	100%	43.5%	46.1%	9.1%	0.3%	1.0%
				12,502,567	13,266,592	2,621,548	91,746	290,218
1951	34,645,573	28,595,668	100%	48.0%	48.8%	2.5%	0.1%	0.6%
				13,717,538	13,948,605	730,556	21,640	177,329
1955	34,858,263	26,760,493	100%	49.7%	46.4%	2.7%	0.1%	1.1%
				13,286,564	12,404,970	722,405	33,144	313,410
1959	35,397,080	27,859,241	100%	49.4%	43.8%	5.9%	0.1%	0.8%
				13,749,830	12,215,538	1,638,571	30,897	224,405

\*University seats are excluded : other 1945 figures are adjusted to eliminate the distortions introduced by double voting in the 15 two-member seats then existing.

### II. THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

	Total Membership	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Other
1945	640	212	394	12	22
1950	625	298	315	9	3
1951	625	321	295	6	3
1955	630	344	277	6	3
1959	630	365	258	6	1



# APPENDIX C

## THE CANDIDATES

1955

Occupation	Conservative		Labour	
	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated
<b>Professions</b>				
Barrister	66	41	27	21
Solicitor	11	19	9	14
Doctor, Surgeon, Dentist	2	4	8	4
Architect, Surveyor	3	4	0	0
Civil Engineer	3	1	0	1
Chartered secretary or accountant	11	11	2	3
Civil Servant, Local Govt., I. C. S., Col. Servant	12	4	9	8
Armed Services	47	18	3	2
<b>Teaching:</b>				
University	2	7	10	15
Adult	0	0	4	17
School	2	13	25	59
Minister of Religion	0	0	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Business</b>				
Small business	0	19	9	7
Company Director	62	24	2	1
Company Manager	16	16	4	4
<b>Commerce, Insurance, Finance:</b>				
Management	16	21	6	7
Clerical	7	19	14	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>				
Miscellaneous 'white collar'	4	9	5	17
Private means	11	1	0	0
Politician, Political organiser	17	0	7	1
Journalists, publicists	19	14	27	30
Farmer	31	12	5	9
Housewife	1	0	2	5
Student	0	4	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Workers</b>				
Railway clerks	0	0	10	12
Miners	0	4	33	10
Skilled	1	12	29	45
Semi-skilled, unskilled	0	2	25	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>343</b>



APPENDIX C - Continued

THE CANDIDATES

1959

Occupation	Conservative		Labour	
	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated
<b>Professions</b>				
Barrister	72	38	27	24
Solicitor	14	22	10	12
Doctor, dentist	5	3	7	10
Architect	6	6	1	3
Civil Engineer	5	4	1	9
Chartered Secretary	9	9	3	5
Civil Servant, Local Govt.	14	3	8	8
Armed Services	37	1	3	2
Teaching:				
University	2	1	10	11
Adult	3	3	4	12
School	--	14	22	58
Minister of Religion	--	--	2	1
Total	167	104	98	155
<b>Business</b>				
Small business	3	9	12	9
Company Director	68	38	1	3
Company Executive	20	32	5	14
Commerce, Insurance, etc.:				
Management	19	20	3	12
Clerical	3	4	5	29
Total	113	103	26	67
<b>Miscellaneous</b>				
Miscellaneous 'white collar'	4	10	6	20
Private means	4	1	--	--
Politician	11	2	7	2
Publicists, Journalists	26	7	25	25
Farmer	38	9	3	7
Housewife	1	6	3	4
Student	--	5	--	1
Total	84	40	44	59
<b>Workers</b>				
Railway clerks	--	--	8	8
Miners	--	1	34	2
Skilled	1	9	22	52
Semi- and unskilled	--	3	26	20
Total	1	13	90	82
Grand Total	365	260	258	363





APPENDIX C - Continued

1955

Education	Conservative		Labour	
	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated
Oxford	105	40	29	32
Cambridge	77	29	17	15
Other Universities	36	55	64	98
All Universities	218	124	110	145
A Public School Education	260	121	62	58
Eton	78	19	4	1
Harrow	20	6	1	1
Winchester	12	2	4	1

1959

Education	Conservative		Labour	
	Elected	Defeated	Elected	Defeated
Oxford	104	46	34	35
Cambridge	79	35	12	27
Other Universities	35	52	55	81
All Universities	218	133	101	143
Eton	73	16	3	3
Harrow	20	3	0	1
Winchester	12	7	3	1
Other Public School	158	84	41	39
All Public Schools	263	110	47	44



# APPENDIX D

## TRADE UNION CONTRIBUTIONS TO CENTRAL LABOUR PARTY FUNDS

Year	Trade Union Affiliation Fees £	By- Election Fund Subscrip- tions £	Grants £	Total £	Per cent of Central Income Given by Trade Unions* %	Labour Party Central Expendi- ture* £	Labour Party Central Balances £
1943	--	--	--	--	--	--	33,275
1944	49,343	2,450	34,187	85,980	89	56,833	74,420
1945	51,307	2,483	66,967	120,757	73	100,424	151,846
1946	50,633	3,255	250	54,138	68	92,219	138,830
1947	81,274	3,497	54,002	138,773	86	107,323	193,436
1948	129,476	4,427	68,483	202,386	86	133,101	315,498
1949	125,829	4,603	175,317	305,749	86	200,658	461,571
1950	126,681	4,830	8,262	139,773	72	292,546	347,525
1951	124,306	4,217	101,199	229,722	82	244,093	377,869
1952	126,299	4,945	250	131,494	76	202,232	347,525
1953	125,840	4,822	1,750	132,412	77	172,574	347,473
1954	138,669	4,932	250	143,851	80	182,659	345,115
1955	140,931	5,182	99,815	245,928	90	219,204	374,540
1956	141,271	4,943	--	146,214	81	182,603	328,131
1957	209,409	4,899	300	214,708	84	274,961	306,823
1958	209,549	4,967	149,051#	363,567	84	328,829	355,993

\*Interest and trading items counted net.

#Includes £44,000 received by the Labour Party in 1959.



# APPENDIX E

## BRITISH CLASS STRUCTURE IN 1951

### HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1951

Classified by Social Class and Socio-economic Group. Excluding Households whose head is retired or unoccupied

(figures in thousands)

	Social Class			Socio-economic Group		
	Number	Per cent		Number	Per cent	Per cent
I	411.4	3.3	(3) Higher Administrative, Professional, and Managerial workers, including large employers	411.4	3.3	3.3
II	2,263.1	18.3	(1) Farmers	323.9	2.7	
			(4) Intermediate Administrative, Professional and Managerial workers, including Teachers	1,377.5	11.2	
			(5) Shopkeepers and small employers	605.6	4.9	18.8
III	6,111.0	49.5	(6) Clerical workers	623.5	5.1	
			(7) Shop Assistants	388.1	3.1	
			(9) Foremen and Supervisors	490.3	4.0	12.2
			(8) Personal Services	511.7	4.1	
			(10) Skilled workers	4,271.2	34.6	38.7
IV	2,028.3	16.5	(11) Semi-skilled workers	1,387.5	11.2	
			(2) Agricultural labourers	513.7	4.2	15.4
V	1,523.4	12.4	(12) Unskilled workers	1,390.8	11.3	
			(13) Armed Forces (other ranks)	42.0	0.3	11.6
Totals	12,337.2	100		12,337.2	100	100

Households unclassified because their heads were unoccupied or retired numbered 2,144.3 thousands or 14.8 per cent of the total. If they are included in the total as a separate group the percentages for the five Classes in Column 1 become--Class I, 2.8, Class II, 15.7, Class III, 42.2, Class IV, 14.0 and Class V, 10.5.



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